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Jane L Claton

WHITE HEATHER

WHITE HEATHER

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF 'MACLEOD OF DARE,' 'JUDITH SHAKESPEARE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1885

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Printed by R. & R. Clark, *Edinburgh.*

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

A Further Discovery 1

CHAPTER II.

Confessions 12

CHAPTER III.

Hesitations 25

CHAPTER IV.

'Among the Untrodden Ways' 39

CHAPTER V.

A Lesson in Fly-fishing 51

CHAPTER VI.

PAGE

Poeta . . . non fit 67

CHAPTER VII.

A Last Day on the Loch 81

CHAPTER VIII.

The Parting 93

CHAPTER IX.

Southwards 107

CHAPTER X.

Gray Days 122

CHAPTER XI.

Kate 131

CHAPTER XII.

A Social Evening 145

CHAPTER XIII.

PAGE

INDUCEMENTS 159

CHAPTER XIV.

ENTANGLEMENTS 173

CHAPTER XV.

CAMPSIE GLEN 185

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DOWNWARD WAY 197

WHITE HEATHER.

CHAPTER I.

A FURTHER DISCOVERY.

It can hardly be wondered at that these suddenly presented ambitious projects—this call to be up and doing, and getting forward in the general race of the world—should add a new interest and fascination, in his eyes, to the society of the American father and daughter who had wandered into these distant wilds. And perhaps, after all, he had been merely wasting his time and throwing away his life? That solitary, contented, healthy and happy existence was a mistake—an idle dream—an anachronism, even? The common way of the world was right; and that, as he heard of it in the echoes brought by these strangers from without, was all a pushing and striving and making the most of opportunities, until the end was reached—independence and ease and wealth; the power of choosing this or that continent for a residence; the radiant happiness and glow of success. And then it all seemed so easy and practicable when he heard these two talking about their friends and the fortunes they had made; and it seemed still more easy—and a far more desirable and beautiful thing—when it was

Miss Carry herself who was speaking, she seated alone in the stern of the boat, her eyes—that had a kind of surface darkness and softness, like blackberries wet with rain—helping out her speech, and betraying an open friendliness, and even conferring a charm on her descriptions of that far-off pork-producing city of the west. Mr. Hodson, as he sate upright in his easy-chair before the fire, spoke slowly and sententiously, and without any visible enthusiasm; Miss Carry, in the stern of the coble, her face all lit up with the blowing winds and the sunlight, talked with far greater vivacity, and was obviously deeply interested in the future of her companion. And it had come to this now, that, as she sate opposite him, he quite naturally and habitually regarded her eyes as supplementing her meaning; he no longer rather shrank from the directness of her look; he no longer wished that she would sit the other way, and attend to the tops of the salmon-rods. As for their speech together, the exceeding frankness of it and lack of conventionality arose from one or two causes, but no doubt partly from this—that during their various adventures on the loch there was no time for the observance of studied forms. It was 'Do this' and 'Do that,' on his part—sometimes with even a sharp word of monition; and with her it was 'Will that do, Ronald?' or again,—when she was standing up in fell encounter with her unseen enemy, both hands engaged with the rod—'Ronald, tie my cap down, or the wind will blow it away—No, no, the other strings—underneath!'

Indeed, on the morning after the evening on which they had been urging him to make a career for himself, there was not much chance of any calm discussion of that subject. The proceedings of the day opened in a remarkably lively manner. For one thing the wind had backed

still farther during the night, and was now blowing briskly from the north, bringing with it from time to time smart snow showers that blackened the heavens and earth for a few minutes and then sped on, leaving the peaks and shoulders and even the lower spurs of the hills all a gleaming white in the wintry sunlight.

'Salmon-fishing in a snow-storm—well, I declare!' said she, as she stood on the shore of the lake, watching him putting the rods together.

'The very best time,' said he, in his positive way (for he had assumed a kind of authority over her, whereas with Meenie he was always reserved and distant and timidly gentle). 'None better. I would just like to find a foot of snow on the ground, right down to the edge of the loch; and the flakes falling so thick ye couldna see a dozen yards ahead of ye.'

'Do you know where I should be then?' she retorted. 'I should be warming my toes in front of Mrs. Murray's peat-fire.'

'Not one bit,' said he, just as positively. 'If ye heard the salmon were taking, ye'd be down here fast enough, I'm thinking.'

And presently it seemed as if this early start of theirs was to be rewarded, for scarcely were both lines out—and Miss Carry was just settling herself down for a little quiet talk, and was pulling the collar of her ulster higher over her ears (for the wind was somewhat cold)—when a sudden tugging and straining at one of the rods, followed by a sharp scream of the reel, upset all these little plans. She made a dash at the rod and raised it quickly.

'That's a good fish—that's a good fish!' Ronald cried, with his mouth set hard. 'Now let's see if we canna hold

on to this one. Let him go, lassie!—I beg your pardon—let him go—let him go—that's right—a clean fish, and a beauty!'

Beauty or no, the salmon had no hesitation about showing himself, at least; for now he began to lash the surface of the water, some fifty yards away, not springing into the air, but merely beating the waves with head and body and tail to get rid of this unholy thing that he had pursued and gripped. Then down he went with a mighty plunge—the reel whirring out its shrill cry, and Miss Carry's gloves suffering in consequence—and there he sulked; so that they backed the boat again, and again she got in some of the line. What was the sound that came across the lake to them, in the face of the northerly wind?

'They're waving a handkerchief to ye, Miss Hodson,' said he, 'from the other boat.'

'Oh, bother,' said she (for the strain of a heavy salmon and forty yards of line was something on her arms), 'here, take the handkerchief from this breast-pocket, and wave it back to them—stand up beside me—they won't see the difference——'

He did as he was bid; apparently she paid little attention; she seemed wholly bent on getting the fish. And clearly the salmon had somewhat exhausted himself with his first escapades; he now lay deep down, not stirring an inch; so that she got in her line until there was not more than twenty yards out: then they waited.

And meanwhile this strange thing that was overtaking them? The bright, windy, changeable day—with its gleaming snow-slopes and sunlit straths and woods darkened by passing shadows—seemed to be slowly receding from them, and around them came a kind of hushed and stealthy

gloom. And then the wind stirred again; the gusts came sharper and colder; here and there a wet particle stung the cheek or the back of the hand. Of course, she was in a death-struggle with a salmon; she could not heed. And presently the gathering blackness all around seemed to break into a soft bewilderment of snow; large, soft, woolly flakes came driving along before the wind; all the world was shut out from them; they could see nothing but a short space of livid dark water, and feel nothing but this choking silent thing in the air. And then again, with a magical rapidity, the heavens and the earth seemed to open above and around them; the clouds swept on; there was a great deep of dazzling blue suddenly revealed in the sky overhead; and all the dancing waters of the lake, from the boat to the farthest shores, were one flashing and lapping mass of keen, pure cobalt, absolutely bewildering to the eyes. The joy of that radiant colour, after the mystery and the darkness! And then the sunlight broke out; and Clebrig had a touch of gold along his mighty shoulders; and Ben Loyal's snow-slopes were white against the brilliant blue; and it seemed as if the fairest of soft summer skies were shining over Bonnie Strath-Naver.

To her it meant that she could see a little more clearly. She shook the snowflakes from her hair.

'Ronald, you are sure it is not a kelt?'

'Indeed I am. There's nothing of the kelt about that one.'

'If it is,' said she, 'I'll go home and tell my ma.'

She was clearly feeling a little more secure about this one. And she did capture the creature in the end, though it was after a long and arduous struggle. For he was a strong fish—fresh run up from the sea, and heavy for his

size; and again and again, and a dozen times repeated, he would make rushes away from the boat just as they thought he was finally showing the white feather. It was the toughest fight she had had; but practice was hardening her muscles a little; and she had acquired a little dexterity in altering her position and shifting the strain. By this time the other boat was coming round.

'Stick to him, Carry!' her father cried. 'No Secesh tactics allowed: hold on to him!'

The next moment Ronald had settled all that by a smart scoop of the clip; and there in the bottom of the boat lay a small-headed deep-shouldered fish of just over sixteen pounds—Ronald pinning him down to get the minnow out of his jaw, and the lad Johnnie grinning all over his ruddy face with delight.

Miss Carry looked on in a very calm and business-like fashion; though in reality her heart was beating quickly—with gladness and exultation. And then, with the same business-like calmness, she took from the deep pocket of her ulster a flask that she had borrowed from Mr. Murray.

'Ronald,' said she, 'you must drink to our good luck.'

She handed him the flask. She appeared to be quite to the manner born now. You would not have imagined that her heart was beating so quickly, or her hands just a little bit nervous and shaky after that prolonged excitement.

Good luck seemed to follow the Duke's boat this morning. Within the next three quarters of an hour they had got hold of another salmon—just over ten pounds. And it was barely lunch time when they had succeeded in landing a third—this time a remarkably handsome fish of fifteen pounds. She now thought she had done enough. She resumed her seat contentedly; there was no elation visible

on her face. But she absolutely forbade the putting out of the lines again.

'Look here, Ronald,' she said seriously. 'What do you think I came here for? Do you think I came here to leave my bones in a foreign land? I am just about dead now. My arms are not made of steel. We can go ashore, and get lunch unpacked; the other boat will follow quickly enough. I tell you my arms and wrists have just had about enough for one morning.'

And a very snug and merry little luncheon-party they made there—down by the side of the lapping water, and under the shelter of a wood of young birch-trees. For the other boat had brought ashore two salmon; so that the five handsome fish, laid side by side on a broad slab of rock, made an excellent show. Miss Carry said nothing about her arms aching; but she did not seem to be in as great a hurry as the others to set to work again. No; she enjoyed the rest; and, observing that Ronald had finished his lunch, she called to him, under the pretext of wanting to know something about sending the fish south. This led on to other things; the three of them chatting together contentedly enough, and Ronald even making bold enough to light his pipe. A very friendly little group this was—away by themselves there in these wintry solitudes—with the wide blue waters of the lake in front of them, and the snows of Clebrig white against the sky. And if he were to go away from these familiar scenes, might he not come back again in the after days? And with the splendid power of remaining or going, just as he pleased?—just as these friendly folk could, who spoke so lightly of choosing this or that quarter of the globe for their temporary habitation? Yes, there were many things that money could do: these two

strangers, now, could linger here at Inver-Mudal just as long as the salmon-fishing continued to amuse them; or they could cross over to Paris, and see the wonders there; or they could go away back to the great cities and harbours and lakes and huge hotels that they spoke so much about. He listened with intensest interest, and with a keen imagination. And was this part of the shore around them—with its rocks and brushwood and clear water—really like the shores of Lake George, where she was so afraid of rattlesnakes? She said she would send him some photographs of Lake Michigan.

Then in the boat in the afternoon she quite innocently remarked that she wished he was going back home with them; for that he would find the voyage across the Atlantic so amusing. She described the people coming out to say good-bye at Liverpool; and the throwing of knives and pencil-cases and what not as farewell gifts from the steamer to the tender, and *vice versâ;* she described the scamper round Queenstown and the waiting for the mails; then the long days on the wide ocean, with all the various occupations, and the concerts in the evening, and the raffles in the smoking-room (this from hearsay); then the crowding on deck for the first glimpse of the American coast-line; and the gliding over the shallows of Sandy Hook; and the friends who would come steaming down the Bay to wave handkerchiefs and welcome them home. She seemed to regard it as a quite natural and simple thing that he should be of this party; and that, after landing, her father should take him about and 'see him through,' as it were; and if her fancy failed to carry out these forecasts, and to picture him walking along Dearborn Avenue or driving out with them to Washington Park, it was that once or twice ere

now she had somehow arrived at the notion that Ronald Strang and Chicago would prove to be incongruous. Or was it some instinctive feeling that, however natural and fitting their friendship might be in this remote little place in the Highlands, it might give rise to awkwardness over there? Anyhow, that could not prevent her father from seeing that Ronald had ample introductions and guidance when he landed at New York; and was not that the proper sphere for one of his years and courage and abilities?

When they got ashore at the end of the day it was found that each boat had got two more salmon, so that there was a display of nine big fish on the grass there in the gathering dusk.

'And to think that I should live to catch five salmon in one day,' said Miss Carry, as she contemplated her share of the spoil. 'Well, no one will believe it; for they're just real mean people at home; and they won't allow that anything's happened to you in Europe unless you have something to show for it. I suppose Ronald would give me a written guarantee. Anyway, I am going to take that big one along to the Doctor—it will be a good introduction, won't it, pappa?'

But a curious thing happened about that same salmon. When they got to the inn the fish were laid out on the stone flags of the dairy—the coolest and safest place for them in the house; and Miss Carry, who had come along to see them, when she wanted anything done, naturally turned to Ronald.

'Ronald,' said she, 'I want to give that big one to Mrs. Douglas, and I am going along now to the cottage. Will you carry it for me?'

He said something about getting a piece of string and

left. A couple of minutes thereafter the lad Johnnie appeared, with a stout bit of cord in his hand; and he, having affixed that to the head and the tail of the salmon, caught it up, and stood in readiness. She seemed surprised.

'Where is Ronald?' said she—for he was always at her bidding.

'He asked me to carry the fish to the Doctor's house, mem,' said the lad. 'Will I go now?'

Moreover, this salmon was accidentally responsible for a still further discovery. When Miss Carry went along to call on the Douglases, little Maggie was with her friend Meenie; and they all of them had tea together; and when the little Maggie considered it fitting she should go home, Miss Carry said she would accompany her—for it was now quite dark. And they had a good deal of talk by the way, partly about schooling and accomplishments, but much more largely about Ronald, who was the one person in all the world in the eyes of his sister. And if Maggie was ready with her information, this pretty young lady was equally interested in receiving it, and also in making inquiries. And thus it came about that Miss Carry now for the first time learned that Ronald was in the habit of writing poems, verses, and things of that kind; and that they were greatly thought of by those who had seen them or to whom he had sent them.

'Why, I might have guessed as much,' she said to herself, as she walked on alone to the inn—though what there was in Ronald's appearance to suggest that he was a writer of rhymes it might have puzzled any one to determine.

But this was a notable discovery; and it set her quick

and fertile brain working in a hundred different ways; but mostly she bethought her of one John C. Huysen and of a certain newspaper-office on Fifth Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

'Well, there,' she said to herself, as the result of these rapid cogitations, 'if Jack Huysen's good for anything—if he wants to say he has done me a service—if he wants to show he has the spirit of a man in him—well, *now's his chance.*'

CHAPTER II.

CONFESSIONS.

It was but another instance of the curiously magnetic influence of this man's personality that she instantly and unhesitatingly assumed that what he wrote must be of value. Now every second human being, as well she knew, writes verses at one period of his life, and these are mostly trash; and remain discreetly hidden, or are mercifully burned. But what Ronald wrote, she was already certain, must be characteristic of himself, and have interest and definite worth; and what better could she do than get hold of some of these things, and have them introduced to the public, perhaps with some little preliminary encomium written by a friendly hand? She had heard from the little Maggie that Ronald had never sent any of his writings to the newspapers; might not this be a service? She could not offer him a sovereign because he happened to be in the boat when she caught her first salmon; but fame—the appeal to the wide-reading public—the glory of print? Nay, might they not be of some commercial value also? She knew but little of the customs of the Chicago journals, but she guessed that a roundabout hint conveyed to Mr. John C. Huysen would not be without effect. And what were the subjects, she asked herself, that Ronald wrote about?

In praise of deerstalking, for one thing, and mountain-climbing, and out-of-door life, she felt assured: you could see it in his gait and in his look; you could hear it in his laugh and his singing as he went along the road. Politics, perhaps—if sarcastic verses were in his way; for there was a sharp savour running through his talk; and he took abundant interest in public affairs. Or perhaps he would be for recording the charms of some rustic maiden—some 'Jessie, the Flower o' Dumblane'—some blue-eyed and rather silent and uninteresting young person, living alone in a glen, and tending cattle or hanging out things to dry on a hedge? Well, even a song would be something. The *Chicago Citizen* might not pay very much for it, but the great and generous public might take kindly to it; and if Jack Huysen did not say something friendly about it, then she would know the reason why.

But the stiffest struggle Miss Carry ever had with any salmon was mere child's play compared with the fight she had with Ronald himself over this matter. At first he was exceedingly angry that she should have been told; but then he laughed, and said to her that there were plenty of folk in Scotland as elsewhere who wrote idle verses, but that they had the common sense to say nothing about it. If she wanted a memento of her stay in the Highlands to take back with her to America, he would give her her choice of the deer-skins he had in the shed; that would be appropriate, and she was welcome to the best of them; but as for scribblings and nonsense of that kind—no, no. On the other hand she was just as persistent, and treated him to a little gentle raillery, wondering that he had not yet outgrown the years of shyness; and finally, when everything else had failed, putting her request as a grace and courtesy

to be granted to an American stranger. This was hardly fair; but she was very anxious about the matter; and she knew that her demand was founded far less on mere curiosity than on an honest desire to do him a service.

Of course he yielded; and a terrible time he had of it the night he set about selecting something to show to her. For how could she understand the circumstances in which these random things were written—these idle fancies of a summer morning—these careless love songs—these rhymed epistles in which the practical common sense and shrewd advice were much more conspicuous than any graces of art? And then again so many of them were about Meenie; and these were forbidden; the praise of Meenie—even when it was the birds and the roses and the foxgloves and the summer rills that sang of her—was not for alien eyes. But at last he lit upon some verses supposed to convey the sentiments of certain exiles met together on New Year's night in Nova Scotia; and he thought it was a simple kind of thing; at all events it would get him out of a grievous difficulty. So —for the lines had been written many a day ago, and came upon him now with a new aspect—he altered a phrase here or there, by way of passing the time; and finally he made a fair copy. The next morning, being a Sunday, he espied Miss Carry walking down towards the river; and he overtook her and gave her this little piece to redeem his pledge.

'It's not worth much,' said he, 'but you'll understand what it is about. Burn it when you've read it—that's all I ask of ye——' Then on he went, glad not to be cross-questioned, the faithful Harry trotting at his heels.

So she sat down on the stone parapet of the little bridge—on this hushed, still, shining morning that was quite summer-like in its calm—and opened the paper with

not a little curiosity. And well enough she understood the meaning of the little piece: she knew that the Mackays[1] used to live about here; and was not Strath-Naver but a few miles off; and this the very Mudal river running underneath the bridge on which she was sitting? But here are the verses she read—and he had entitled them

ACROSS THE SEA.

In Nova Scotia's clime they've met
To keep the New Year's night;
The merry lads and lasses crowd
Around the blazing light.

But father and mother sit withdrawn
To let their fancies flee
To the old, old time, and the old, old home
That's far across the sea.

And what strange sights and scenes are these
That sadden their shaded eyes?
Is it only thus they can see again
The land of the Mackays?

O there the red-deer roam at will;
And the grouse whirr on the wing;
And the curlew call, and the ptarmigan
Drink at the mountain spring;

And the hares lie snug on the hillside;
And the lusty blackcock crows;
But the river the children used to love
Through an empty valley flows.

Do they see again a young lad wait
To shelter with his plaid,
When she steals to him in the gathering dusk,
His gentle Highland maid?

[1] Pronounced *Mackise*, with the accent on the second syllable.

Do they hear the pipes at the weddings;
Or the low sad funeral wail
As the boat goes out to the island,
And the pibroch tells its tale?

O fair is Naver's strath, and fair
The strath that Mudal laves;
And dear the haunts of our childhood,
And dear the old folks' graves;

And the parting from one's native land
Is a sorrow hard to dree:
God's forgiveness to them that sent us
So far across the sea!

And is bonnie Strath-Naver shining,
As it shone in the bygone years?—
As it shines for us now—ay, ever—
Though our eyes are blind with tears.

Well, her own eyes were moist—though that was but for a moment; for when she proceeded to walk slowly and meditatively back to the inn, her mind was busy with many things; and she began to think that she had not got any way near to the understanding of this man, whom she had treated in so familiar a fashion, as boatman, and companion, and gillie—almost as valet. What lay behind those eyes of his, that glowed with so strange a light at times, and seemed capable of reading her through and through, only that the slightly tremulous eyelids came down and veiled them, or that he turned away his head? And why this strain of pathos in a nature that seemed essentially joyous and glad and careless? Not only that, but in the several discussions with her father—occasionally becoming rather warm, indeed—Ronald had been invariably on the side of the landlord, as was naturally to be expected. He had insisted that the great bulk of the land given over

to deer was of no possible use to any other living creature; he had maintained the right of the landlord to clear any portion of his property of sheep and forest it, if by so doing he could gain an increase of rental; he had even maintained the right of the landlord to eject non-paying tenants from holdings clearly not capable of supporting the ever-increasing families; and so forth. But was his feeling, after all, with the people—he himself being one of the people? His stout championship of the claims and privileges of Lord Ailine—that was not incompatible with a deeper sense of the cruelty of driving the poor people away from the land of their birth and the home of their childhood? His natural sentiment as a man was not to be overborne by the fact that he was officially a dependant on Lord Ailine? These and a good many other curious problems concerning him—and concerning his possible future—occupied her until she had got back to the snug little parlour; and there, as she found her father seated in front of the blazing fire, and engaged in getting through the mighty pile of newspapers and illustrated journals and magazines that had come by the previous day's mail, she thought she might as well sit down and write a long letter to her bosom friend in Chicago, through whose intermediation these verses might discreetly be brought to the notice of Mr. Huysen. She had reasons for not asking any favour directly.

'DEAREST EM,' she wrote—after having studied a long while as to how she should begin—'would it surprise you to know that I have at last found my *fate* in the very handsome person of a Scotch gamekeeper? Well, it aint so; don't break the furniture; but the fact is my poor brain has been wool-gathering a little in this land of wild storms and legends and romantic ballads; and to-morrow I

am fleeing away to Paris—the region of clear atmosphere, and reasonable people, and cynicism; and I hope to have any lingering cobwebs of romance completely blown out of my head. Not that I would call it romance, *even if it were to happen;* I should call it merely the plain result of my father's theories. You know he is always preaching that all men are born equal; which isn't true anyhow; he would get a little nearer the truth if he were to say that all men are born equal except hotel clerks, who are of a superior race; but wouldn't it be a joke if I were to take him at his word, and ask him how he would like a game-keeper as his son-in-law? But you need not be afraid, my dear Em; this chipmunk has still got a little of her senses left; and I may say in the words of the poet—

"There is not in this wide world a valet so sweet"—

no, nor any Claude Melnotte of a gardener, nor any handsome coachman or groom, who could induce me to run away with him. It would be "playing it too low down on pa," as you used to say; besides, one knows how these things always end. Another besides; how do I know that he would marry me, even if I asked him?—and I *should* have to ask him, for he would never ask me. Now, Em, if you don't burn this letter the moment you have read it, I will murder you, as sure as you are alive.

'Besides, it is a shame. He is a real good fellow; and no such nonsense has got into his head, I know. I know it, because I tried him twice for fun; I got him to tie my cap under my chin; and I made him take my pocket-handkerchief out of my breast-pocket when I was fighting a salmon (I caught *five in one day*—monsters!), and do you think the bashful young gentleman was embarrassed and

showed trembling fingers? Not a bit; I think he thought me rather a nuisance—in the polite phraseology of the English people. But I wish I could tell you about him, really. It's all very well to say he is very handsome and hardy-looking and weather-tanned; but how can I describe to you how respectful his manner is, and yet always keeping his own self-respect, and he won't quarrel with me—he only laughs when I have been talking absolute folly—though papa and he have rare fights, for he has very positive opinions, and sticks to his guns, I can tell you. But the astonishing thing is his education; he has been nowhere, but seems to know everything; he seems to be quite content to be a gamekeeper, though his brother took his degree at college and is now in the Scotch Church. I tell you he makes me feel pretty small at times. The other night papa and I went along to his cottage after dinner, and found him reading Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—lent him by his brother, it appeared. I borrowed the first volume—but, oh, squawks! it is a good deal too stiff work for the likes of me. And then there is never the least pretence or show, but all the other way; he will talk to you as long as you like about his deerstalking and about what he has seen his dogs do; but never a word about books or writing—unless you happen to have found out.

'Now I'm coming to business. I have never seen any writing of his until this morning, when, after long goading, he showed me a little poem which I will copy out and enclose in this letter when I have finished. Now, darling Em, I want you to do me a real kindness; the first time you see Jack Huysen—I don't want to ask the favour of him direct—will you ask him to print it in the *Citizen*, and to

say something nice about it? I don't want any patronage: understand—I mean let Jack Huysen understand—that Ronald Strang is a particular *friend* of both my father and myself; and that I am sending you this without his authority, but merely to give him a little pleasant surprise, perhaps, when he sees it in print; and perhaps to tempt him to give us some more. I should like him to print a volume, —for he is really far above his present station, and it is absurd he should not take his *place*,—and if he did that I know of a young party who would buy 500 copies even if she were to go back home without a single Paris bonnet. Tell Jack Huysen there is to be *no patronage*, mind; there is to be nothing about the peasant poet, or anything like that; for this man is a *gentleman*, if I know anything about it; and I won't have him trotted out as a phenomenon—to be discussed by the dudes who smoke cigarettes in Lincoln Park. If you could only talk to him for ten minutes it would be better than fifty letters, but I suppose there are *attractions nearer home* just at present. My kind remembrances to *T. T.*

'I forgot to say that I am quite ignorant as to whether newspapers ever pay for poetry—I mean if a number of pieces were sent? Or could Jack Huysen find a publisher who would undertake a volume; my father will see he does not lose anything by it. I really want to do something for this Ronald, for he has been so kind and attentive to us; and before long it may become more difficult to do so; for of course a man of his abilities is not likely to remain as he is; indeed, he has already formed plans for getting away altogether from his present way of life, and whatever he tries to do I know he will do—and easily. But if I talk any more about him, you will be making very *very* mistaken

guesses; and I won't give you the delight of imagining even for a moment that I have been caught at last; when the sad event arrives there will be time enough for you to take your cake-walk of triumph up and down the room—of course to *Dancing in the Barn*, as in the days of old.'

Here followed a long and rambling chronicle of her travels in Europe since her last letter, all of which may be omitted; the only point to be remarked was that her very brief experiences of Scotland took up a disproportionately large portion of the space, and that she was minute in her description of the incidents and excitement of salmon-fishing. Then followed an outline of her present plans; a string of questions; a request for an instant reply; and finally—

'*With dearest love, old Em,*

'*Thine,*

'*Carry.*'

And then she had to copy the verses; but when she had done that, and risen, and gone to the window for a time, some misgiving seemed to enter her mind, for she returned to the table, and sate down again, and wrote this postscript:

'Perhaps, after all, you won't see much in this little piece; if you were here, among the very places, and affected by all the old stories and romantic traditions and the wild scenery, it might be different. Since I've been to Europe I've come to see what's the trouble about our reading English history and literature at home; why, you can't do it, you can't understand it, unless you have lived in an atmosphere that is just full of poetry and romance, and meeting people whose names tell you they belong to the families who did great things in history centuries and centuries ago. I can't explain it very well—not even to

myself; but I feel it; why, you can't take a single day's drive in England without coming across a hundred things of interest—Norman churches, and the tombs of Saxon Kings, and old abbeys, and monasteries, and battlefields, and, just as interesting as any, farm-houses of the sixteenth century in their quaint old-fashioned orchards. And as for Scotland, why, it is just steeped to the lips in poetry and tradition; the hills and the glens have all their romantic stories of the clans, many of them very pathetic; and you want to see these wild and lonely places before you can understand the legends. And in southern Scotland too—what could any one at home make of such a simple couplet as this—

> "*The King sits in Dunfermline town,*
> *Drinking the blude-red wine;*"

but when you come near Dunfermline and see the hill where Malcolm Canmore built his castle in the eleventh century, and when you are told that it was from this very town that Sir Patrick Spens and the Scots lords set out for "Norroway o'er the faem," everything comes nearer to you. In America, I remember very well, Flodden Field sounded to us something very far away, that we couldn't take much interest in; but if you were here just now, dear Em, and told that a bit farther north there was a river that the Earl of Caithness and his clan had to cross when they went to Flodden, and that the people living there at this very day won't go near it on the anniversary of the battle, because on that day the ghosts of the earl and his men, all clad in green tartan, come home again and are seen to cross the river, wouldn't that interest you? In America we have got nothing behind us; when you leave the day before yesterday you don't want to go back. But here, in the most

vulgar superstitions and customs, you come upon the strangest things. Would you believe it, less than twenty miles from this place there is a little lake that is supposed to cure the most desperate diseases—diseases that the doctors have given up; and the poor people meet at midnight, on the first Monday after the change of the moon, and then they throw a piece of money into the lake, and go in and dip themselves three times, and then they must get home before sunrise. Perhaps it is very absurd, but they belong to that same imaginative race of people who have left so many weird stories and poetical legends behind them; and what I say is that you want to come over and breathe this atmosphere of tradition and romance, and see the places, before you can quite understand the charm of all that kind of literature. And perhaps you don't find much in these verses about the poor people who have been driven away from their native strath? Well, they don't claim to be much. They were never meant for *you* to see. But yes, I do think you will like them; and anyhow Jack Huysen has got to like them, and treat them hospitably, unless he is anxious to have his hair raised.

'Gracious me, I think I must hire a hall. I have just read this scrawl over. Sounds rather muzzy, don't it? But it's this poor brain of mine that has got full of confusion and cobwebs and theories of equality, when I wasn't attending to it. My arms had the whole day's work to do—as they remind me at this minute; and the Cerebral Hemispheres laid their heads, or their half-heads together, when I was busy with the salmon; and entered into a conspiracy against me; and began to make pictures—ghosts, phantom earls, and romantic shepherds and peasant-poets, and I don't know what kind of dreams of a deer

stalker walking down Wabash Avenue. But, as I said, to-morrow I start for Paris, thank goodness; and in that calmer atmosphere I hope to come to my senses again; and I will send you a long account of Lily Selden's marriage —though your last letter to me was a fraud: what do I care about the C. M. C. A.? *This* letter, anyhow, you must burn; I don't feel like reading it over again myself, or perhaps I would save you the trouble; but you may depend on it that the one I shall send you from Paris will be quite sane.

'Second P.S.—Of course you must manage Jack Huysen with a little discretion. I don't want to be drawn into it any more than I can help; I mean, I would just hate to write to him direct and ask him for a particular favour; but this is a very little one, and you know him as well as any of us. And mind you burn this letter—instantly—the moment you have read it—for it is just full of nonsense and wool-gathering; and *it will not occur again. Toujours à toi.* C. H.'

'What have you been writing all this time?' her father said, when she rose.

'A letter—to Emma Kerfoot.'

'It will make her stare. You don't often write long letters.'

'I do not,' said she, gravely regarding the envelope; and then she added solemnly: 'But this is the record of a chapter in my life that is now closed for ever—at least, I hope so.'

CHAPTER III.

HESITATIONS.

THE waggonette stood at the door; Miss Carry's luggage was put in; and her father was waiting to see her off. But the young lady herself seemed unwilling to take the final step; twice she went back into the inn, on some pretence or another; and each time she came out she looked impatiently around, as if wondering at the absence of some one.

'Well, ain't you ready yet?' her father asked.

'I want to say good-bye to Ronald,' she said half angrily.

'Oh, nonsense—you are not going to America. Why, you will be back in ten days or a fortnight. See here, Carry,' he added, 'are you sure you don't want me to go part of the way with you?'

'Not at all,' she said promptly. 'It is impossible for Mary to mistake the directions I wrote to her; and I shall find her in the Station Hotel at Inverness all right. Don't you worry about me, pappa.'

She glanced along the road again, in the direction of the keeper's cottage; but there was no one in sight.

'Pappa dear,' she said, in an undertone—for there were one or two onlookers standing by—'if Ronald should decide on giving up his place here, and trying what you suggested, you'll have to stand by him.'

'Oh yes, I'll see him through,' was the complacent answer. 'I should take him to be the sort of man who can look after himself; but if he wants any kind of help—well, here I am; I won't go back on a man who is acting on my advice. Why, if he were to come out to Chicago——'

'Oh no, not Chicago, pappa,' she said, somewhat earnestly, 'not to Chicago. I am sure he will be more at home—he will be happier—in his own country.'

She looked around once more; and then she stepped into the waggonette.

'He might have come to see me off,' she said, a little proudly. 'Good-bye, pappa dear—I will send you a telegram as soon as I get to Paris.'

The two horses sprang forward; Miss Carry waved her lily hand; and then set to work to make herself comfortable with wraps and rugs, for the morning was chill. She thought it was very unfriendly of Ronald not to have come to say good-bye. And what was the reason of it? Of course he could know nothing of the nonsense she had written to her friend in Chicago.

'Have you not seen Ronald about anywhere?' she asked of the driver.

'No, mem,' answered that exceedingly shy youth, 'he wass not about all the morning. But I heard the crack of a gun; maybe he wass on the hill.'

And presently he said—

'I'm thinking that's him along the road—it's two of his dogs whatever.'

And indeed this did turn out to be Ronald who was coming striding along the road, with his gun over his shoulder, a brace of setters at his heels, and something dangling from his left hand. The driver pulled up his horses.

'I've brought ye two or three golden plover to take with ye, Miss Hodson,' Ronald said—and he handed up the birds.

Well, she was exceedingly pleased to find that he had not neglected her, nay, that he had been especially thinking of her and her departure. But what should she do with these birds in a hotel?

'It's so kind of you,' she said, 'but really I'm afraid they're—would you not rather give them to my father?'

'Ye must not go away empty-handed,' said he, with good-humoured insistence; and then it swiftly occurred to her that perhaps this was some custom of the neighbourhood; and so she accepted the little parting gift with a very pretty speech of thanks.

He raised his cap, and was going on.

'Ronald,' she called, and he turned.

'I wish you would tell me,' she said—and there was a little touch of colour in the pretty, pale, interesting face—'if there is anything I could bring from London that would help you—I mean books about chemistry—or—or—about trees—or instruments for land-surveying—I am sure I could get them——'

He laughed, in a doubtful kind of a way.

'I'm obliged to ye,' he said, 'but it's too soon to speak about that. I havena made up my mind yet.'

'Not yet?'

'No.'

'But you will?'

He said nothing.

'Good-bye, then.'

She held out her hand, so that he could not refuse to take it. So they parted; and the horses' hoofs rang again

in the silence of the valley; and she sat looking after the disappearing figure and the meekly following dogs. And then, in the distance, she thought she could make out some faint sound: was he singing to himself as he strode along towards the little hamlet?

'At all events,' she said to herself, with just a touch of pique, 'he does not seem much downhearted at my going away.' And little indeed did she imagine that this song he was thus carelessly and unthinkingly singing was all about Meenie, and red and white roses, and trifles light and joyous as the summer air. For not yet had black care got a grip of his heart.

But this departure of Miss Carry for the south now gave him leisure to attend to his own affairs and proper duties, which had suffered somewhat from his attendance in the coble; and it was not until all these were put straight that he addressed himself to the serious consideration of the ambitious and daring project that had been placed before him. Hitherto it had been pretty much of an idle speculation—a dream, in short, that looked very charming and fascinating as the black-eyed young lady from over the seas sate in the stern of the boat and chatted through the idle hours. Her imagination did not stay to regard the immediate and practical difficulties and risks; all these seemed already surmounted; Ronald had assumed the position to which he was entitled by his abilities and personal character; she only wondered which part of Scotland he would be living in when next her father and herself visited Europe; and whether they might induce him to go over with them for a while to the States. But when Ronald himself, in cold blood, came to consider ways and means, there was no such plain and easy sailing. Not that he hesi-

tated about cutting himself adrift from his present moorings; he had plenty of confidence in himself, and knew that he could always earn a living with his ten fingers, whatever happened. Then he had between £80 and £90 lodged in a savings bank in Inverness; and out of that he could pay for any classes he might have to attend, or perhaps offer a modest premium if he wished to get into a surveyor's office for a short time. But there were so many things to think of. What should he do about Maggie, for example? Then Lord Ailine had always been a good master to him: would it not seem ungrateful that he should throw up his situation without apparent reason? And so forth, and so forth, through cogitations long and anxious; and many a half-hour on the hillside and many a half-hour by the slumbering peat-fire was given to this great project; but always there was one side of the question that he shut out from his mind. For how could he admit to himself that this lingering hesitation—this dread, almost, of what lay await for him in the future—had anything to do with the going away from Meenie, and the leaving behind him, and perhaps for ever, the hills and streams and lonely glens that were all steeped in the magic and witchery of her presence? Was it not time to be done with idle fancies? And if, in the great city—in Edinburgh or Glasgow, as the case might be—he should fall to thinking of Ben Loyal and Bonnie Strath-Naver, and the long, long days on Clebrig; and Meenie coming home in the evening from her wanderings by Mudal-Water, with a few wild-flowers, perhaps, or a bit of white heather, but always with her beautiful blue-gray Highland eyes so full of kindness as she stopped for a few minutes' friendly chatting—well, that would be a pretty picture to look back upon, all lambent

and clear in the tender colours that memory loves to use. A silent picture, of course: there would be no sound of the summer rills, nor the sweeter sound of Meenie's voice; but not a sad picture; only remote and ethereal, as if the years had come between, and made everything distant and pale and dreamlike.

The first definite thing that he did was to write to his brother in Glasgow, acquainting him with his plans, and begging him to obtain some further particulars about the Highland and Agricultural Society's certificates. The answer that came back from Glasgow was most encouraging; for the Rev. Alexander Strang, though outwardly a heavy and lethargic man, had a shrewd head enough, and was an enterprising shifty person, not a little proud of the position that he had won for himself, and rather inclined to conceal from his circle of friends—who were mostly members of his congregation—the fact that his brother was merely a gamekeeper in the Highlands. Nay, more, he was willing to assist; he would take Maggie into his house, so that there might be no difficulty in that direction; and in the meantime he would see what were the best class-books on the subjects named, so that Ronald might be working away at them in these comparatively idle spring and summer months, and need not give up his situation prematurely. There was even some hint thrown out that perhaps Ronald might board with his brother; but this was not pressed; for the fact was that Mrs. Alexander was a severely rigid disciplinarian, and on the few occasions on which Ronald had been their guest she had given both brothers to understand that the frivolous gaiety of Ronald's talk, and the independence of his manners, and his Gallio-like indifference about the fierce schisms and heart-burnings

in the Scotch Church were not, in her opinion, in consonance with the atmosphere that ought to prevail in a Free Church minister's house. But on the whole the letter was very friendly and hopeful; and Ronald was enjoined to let his brother know when his decision should be finally taken, and in what way assistance could be rendered him.

One night the little Maggie stole away through the dark to the Doctor's cottage. There was a light in the window of Meenie's room; she could hear the sound of the piano; no doubt Meenie was practising and alone; and on such occasions a visit from Maggie was but little interruption. And so the smaller girl went boldly towards the house and gained admission, and was proceeding upstairs without any ceremony, when the sudden cessation of the music caused her to stop. And then she heard a very simple and pathetic air begin—just touched here and there with a few chords: and was Meenie, tired with the hard work of the practising, allowing herself this little bit of quiet relaxation? She was singing too—though so gently that Maggie could scarcely make out the words. But she knew the song—had not Meenie sung it many times before to her?—and who but Meenie could put such tenderness and pathos into the simple air? She had almost to imagine the words—so gentle was the voice that went with those lightly-touched chords—

'The sun rase sae rosy, the gray hills adorning,
Light sprang the laverock, and mounted on hie,
When true to the tryst o' blythe May's dewy morning,
Jeanie cam' linking out owre the green lea.
To mark her impatience I crap 'mong the brackens,
Aft, aft to the kent gate she turned her black e'e;
Then lying down dowilie, sighed, by the willow tree,
"I am asleep, do not waken me."'[1]

[1] '*I am asleep, do not waken me*' is the English equivalent of the

Then there was silence. The little Maggie waited; for this song was a great favourite with Ronald, who himself sometimes attempted it; and she would be able to tell him when she got home that she had heard Meenie sing it—and he always listened with interest to anything, even the smallest particulars, she could tell him about Meenie and about what she had done or said. But where were the other verses? She waited and listened; the silence was unbroken. And so she tapped lightly at the door and entered.

And then something strange happened. For when Maggie shut the door behind her and went forward, Meenie did not at once turn her head to see who this was, but had hastily whipped out her handkerchief and passed it over her eyes. And when she did turn, it was with a kind of look of bravery—as if to dare any one to say that she had been crying—though there were traces of tears on her cheeks.

'Is it you, Maggie? I am glad to see you,' she managed to say.

The younger girl was rather frightened and sorely concerned as well.

'But what is it, Meenie dear?' she said, going and taking her hand. 'Are you in trouble?'

'No, no,' her friend said, with an effort to appear quite cheerful, 'I was thinking of many things—I scarcely know what. And now take off your things and sit down, Maggie, and tell me all about this great news. It was only this afternoon that my father learnt that you and your brother were going away; and he would not believe it at first, till he saw Ronald himself. And it is true, after all? Dear me, what a change there will be!'

Gaelic name of the air, which is a very old one, and equally pathetic in its Irish and Highland versions.

She spoke quite in her usual manner now; and her lips were no longer trembling, but smiling; and the Highland eyes were clear, and as full of kindness as ever.

'But it is a long way off, Meenie,' the smaller girl began to explain quickly, when she had taken her seat by the fire, 'and Ronald is so anxious to please everybody, and—and that is why I came along to ask you what you think best.'

'I?' said Meenie, with a sudden slight touch of reserve.

'It'll not be a nice thing going away among strange folk,' said her companion, 'but I'll no grumble if it's to do Ronald good; and even among strange folk—well, I don't care as long as I have Ronald and you, Meenie. And it's to Glasgow, and not to Edinburgh, he thinks he'll have to go; and then you will be in Glasgow too; so I do not mind anything else. It will not be so lonely for any of us; and we can spend the evenings together—oh no, it will not be lonely at all——'

'But, Maggie,' the elder girl said gravely, 'I am not going to Glasgow.'

Her companion looked up quickly, with frightened eyes.

'But you said you were going, Meenie!'

'Oh no,' the other said gently. 'My mother has often talked of it—and I suppose I may have to go some time; but my father is against it; and I know I am not going at present anyway.'

'And you are staying here—and—and Ronald and me—we will be by ourselves in Glasgow!' the other exclaimed, as if this prospect were too terrible to be quite comprehended as yet.

'But if it is needful he should go?' Meenie said. 'People have often to part from their friends like that.'

'Yes, and it's no much matter when they have plenty of friends,' said the smaller girl, with her eyes becoming moist, 'but, Meenie, I havena got one but you.'

'Oh no, you must not say that,' her friend remonstrated. 'Why, there is your brother in Glasgow, and his family; I am sure they will be kind to you. And Ronald will make plenty of friends wherever he goes—you can see that for yourself; and do you think you will be lonely in a great town like Glasgow? It is the very place to make friends, and plenty of them——'

'Oh, I don't know what to do—I don't know what to do, if you are not going to Glasgow, Meenie!' she broke in. 'I wonder if it was that that Ronald meant. He asked me whether I would like to stay here or go with him, for Mrs. Murray has offered to take me in, and I would have to help at keeping the books, and that is very kind of them, I am sure, for I did not think I could be of any use to anybody. And you are to be here in Inver-Mudal—and Ronald away in Glasgow——'

Well, it was a bewildering thing. These were the two people she cared for most of all in the world; and virtually she was called upon to choose between them. And if she had a greater loyalty and reverence towards her brother, still, Meenie was her sole girl-friend, and monitress, and counsellor. What would her tasks be without Meenie's approval; how could she get on with her knitting and sewing without Meenie's aid; what would the days be like without the witchery of Meenie's companionship—even if that were limited to a passing word or a smile? Ronald had not sought to influence her choice; indeed, the alternative had scarcely been considered, for she believed that Meenie was going to Glasgow also; and with her hero brother and

her beautiful girl-friend both there, what more could she wish for in the world? But now——?

Well, Meenie, in her wise and kind way, strove to calm the anxiety of the girl; and her advice was altogether in favour of Maggie's going to Glasgow with her brother Ronald, if that were equally convenient to him, and of no greater expense than her remaining in Inver-Mudal with Mrs. Murray.

'For you know he wants somebody to look after him,' Meenie continued, with her eyes rather averted, 'and if it does not matter so much here about his carelessness of being wet and cold, because he has plenty of health and exercise, it will be very different in Glasgow, where there should be some one to bid him be more careful.'

'But he pays no heed to me,' the little sister sighed, 'unless I can tell him you have been saying so-and-so—then he listens. He is very strange. He has never once worn the blue jersey that I knitted for him. He asked me a lot of questions about how it was begun; and I told him as little as I could about the help you had given me,' she continued evasively, 'and when the snow came on, I thought he would wear it; but no—he put it away in the drawer with his best clothes, and it's lying there all neatly folded up—and what is the use of that? If you were going to Glasgow, Meenie, it would be quite different. It will be very lonely there.'

'Lonely!' the other exclaimed; 'with your brother Ronald, and your other brother's family, and all their friends. And then you will be able to go to school and have more regular teaching—Ronald spoke once or twice to me about that.'

'Yes, indeed,' the little Maggie said; but the prospect

did not cheer her much; and for some minutes they both sate silent, she staring into the fire. And then she said bitterly—

'I wish the American people had never come here. It is all their doing. It never would have come into Ronald's head to leave Inver-Mudal but for them. And where else will he be so well known—and—and every one speaking well of him—and every one so friendly——'

'But, Maggie, these things are always happening,' her companion remonstrated. 'Look at the changes my father has had to make.'

'And I wonder if we are never to come back to Inver-Mudal, Meenie?' the girl said suddenly, with appealing eyes.

Meenie tried to laugh, and said—

'Who can tell? It is the way of the world for people to come and go. And Glasgow is a big place—perhaps you would not care to come back after having made plenty of friends there.'

'My friends will always be here, and nowhere else,' the smaller girl said, with emphasis. 'Oh, Meenie, do you think if Ronald were to get on well and make more money than he has now, he would come back here, and bring me too, for a week maybe, just to see every one again?'

'I cannot tell you that, Maggie,' the elder girl said, rather absently.

After this their discussion of the strange and unknown future that lay before them languished somehow; for Meenie seemed preoccupied, and scarcely as blithe and hopeful as she had striven to appear. But when Maggie rose to return home—saying that it was time for her to be looking after Ronald's supper—her friend seemed to pull herself together some-

what, and at once and cheerfully accepted Maggie's invitation to come and have tea with her the following afternoon.

'For you have been so little in to see us lately,' the small Maggie said; 'and Ronald always engaged with the American people—and often in the evening too as well as the whole day long.'

'But I must make a great deal of you now that you are going away,' said Miss Douglas, smiling.

'And Ronald—will I ask him to stay in till you come?'

But here there was some hesitation.

'Oh no, I would not do that—no doubt he is busy just now with his preparations for going away. I would not say anything to him—you and I will have tea together by ourselves.'

The smaller girl looked up timidly.

'Ronald is going away too, Meenie.'

Perhaps there was a touch of reproach in the tone; at all events Meenie said, after a moment's embarrassment—

'Of course I should be very glad if he happened to be in the house—and—and had the time to spare; but I think he will understand that, Maggie, without your saying as much to him.'

'He gave plenty of his time to the American young lady,' said Maggie, rather proudly.

'But I thought you and she were great friends,' Meenie said, in some surprise.

'It takes a longer time than that to make friends,' the girl said; and by and by she left.

Then Meenie went up to her room again, and sate down in front of the dull, smouldering peat-fire, with its heavy lumps of shadow, and its keen edges of crimson, and its occasional flare of flame and shower of sparks. There were

many pictures there—of distant things; of the coming spring-time, with all the new wonder and gladness somehow gone out of it; and of the long long shining summer days, and Inver-Mudal grown lonely; and of the busy autumn time, with the English people come from the south, and no Ronald there, to manage everything for them. For her heart was very affectionate; and she had but few friends; and Glasgow was a great distance away. There were some other fancies too, and self-questionings and perhaps even self-reproaches, that need not be mentioned here. When, by and by, she rose and went to the piano, which was still open, it was not to resume her seat. She stood absently staring at the keys—for these strange pictures followed her; and indeed that one half-unconscious trial of '*I am asleep, do not waken me*' had been quite enough for her in her present mood.

CHAPTER IV.

'AMONG THE UNTRODDEN WAYS.'

Yes; it soon became clear that Meenie Douglas, in view of this forthcoming departure, had resolved to forego something of the too obvious reserve she had recently imposed on herself—if, indeed, that maidenly shrinking and shyness had not been rather a matter of instinct than of will. When Ronald came home on the following evening she was seated with Maggie in the old familiar way at a table plentifully littered with books, patterns, and knitting; and when she shook hands with him, her timidly uplifted eyes had much of the old friendliness in them, and her smile of welcome was pleasant to see. It was he who was diffident and very respectful. For if her mother had enjoined her to be a little more distant in manner towards this one or the other of those around her—well, that was quite intelligible; that was quite right; and he could not complain; but on the other hand, if the girl herself, in this very small domestic circle, seemed rather anxious to put aside those barriers which were necessary out of doors, he would not presume on her good-nature. And yet—and yet—he could not help thawing a little; for she was very kind, and even merry withal; and her eyes were like the eyes of the Meenie of old.

'I am sure Maggie will be glad to get away from Inver-Mudal,' she was saying, 'for she will not find anywhere a schoolmistress as hard as I have been. But maybe she will not have to go to school at all, if she has to keep house for you?'

'But she'll no have to keep house for me,' Ronald said at once. 'If she goes to Glasgow, she'll be much better with my brother's family, for that will be a home for her.'

'And where will you go, Ronald?' she said.

'Oh, into a lodging—I can fend for myself.'

At this she looked grave—nay, she did not care to conceal her disapproval. For had she not been instructing Maggie in the mysteries of housekeeping in a town—as far as these were known to herself: and had not the little girl showed great courage; and declared there was nothing she would not attempt rather than be separated from her brother Ronald?

'It would never do,' said he, 'to leave the lass alone in the house all day in a big town. It's very well here, where she has neighbours and people to look after her from time to time; but among strangers——'

Then he looked at the table.

'But where's the tea ye said ye would ask Miss Douglas in to?'

'We were so busy with the Glasgow housekeeping,' Meenie said, laughing, 'that we forgot all about it.'

'I'll go and get it ready now,' the little Maggie said, and she went from the room, leaving these two alone.

He was a little embarrassed; and she was also. There had been no *amantium irae* of any kind; but all the same the *integratio amoris* was just a trifle difficult; for she on her side was anxious to have their old relations re-established during the brief period that would elapse ere he left the

neighbourhood, and yet she was hesitating and uncertain; while he on his side maintained a strictly respectful reserve. He 'knew his place;' his respect towards her was part of his own self-respect; and if it did not occur to him that it was rather hard upon Meenie that all the advances towards a complete rehabilitation of their friendship should come from her, that was because he did not know that she was moved by any such wish, and also because he was completely ignorant of a good deal else that had happened of late. Of course, certain things were obvious enough. Clearly the half-frightened, distant, and yet regretful look with which she had recently met and parted from him when by chance they passed each other in the road was no longer in her eyes; there was a kind of appeal for friendliness in her manner towards him; she seemed to say, 'Well, you are going away; don't let us forget the old terms on which we used to meet.' And not only did he quickly respond to that feeling, but also he was abundantly grateful to her; did not he wish to carry away with him the pleasantest memories of this beautiful, sweet-natured friend, who had made all the world magical to him for a while, who had shown him the grace and dignity and honour of true womanhood, and made him wonder no less at the charm of her clear-shining simplicity and naturalness? The very name of 'Love Meenie' would be as the scent of a rose—as the song of a lark—for him through all the long coming years.

'It will make a great change about here,' said she, with her eyes averted, 'your going away.'

'There's no one missed for long,' he answered, in his downright fashion. 'Where people go, people come; the places get filled up.'

'Yes, but sometimes they are not quite the same,' said she rather gently. She was thinking of the newcomer. Would he be the universal favourite that Ronald was—always good-natured and laughing, but managing everybody and everything; lending a hand at the sheep-shearing or playing the pipes at a wedding—anything to keep life moving along briskly; and always ready to give her father a day's hare-shooting or a turn at the pools of Mudal-Water when the spates began to clear? She knew quite well—for often had she heard it spoken of—that no one could get on as well as Ronald with the shepherds at the time of the heather-burning: when on the other moors the shepherds and keepers were growling and quarrelling like rival leashes of collies, on Lord Ailine's ground everything was peace and quietness and good humour. And then she had a vague impression that the next keeper would be merely a keeper; whereas Ronald was—Ronald.

'I'm sure I was half ashamed,' said he, 'when I got his lordship's letter. It was as fair an offer as one man could make to another; or rather, half a dozen offers; for he said he would raise my wage, if that was what was wrong; or he would let me have another lad to help me in the kennels; or, if I was tired of the Highlands he would get me a place at his shooting in the south. Well, I was sweirt to trouble his lordship with my small affairs; but after that I couldna but sit down and write to him the real reason of my leaving——'

'And I'm certain,' said she quickly, 'that he will write back and offer you any help in his power.'

'No, no,' said he, with a kind of laugh, 'the one letter is enough—if it ever comes to be a question of a written character. But it's just real friendly and civil of him; and

if I could win up here for a week or a fortnight in August, I would like well to lend them a hand and set them going; for it will be a good year for the grouse, I'm thinking——'

'Oh, will you be coming to see us in August?' she said, with her eyes suddenly and rather wistfully lighting up.

'Well, I don't know how I may be situated,' said he. 'And there's the railway expense—though I would not mind that much if I had the chance otherwise; for his lordship has been a good master to me; and I would just like to lend him a hand, and start the new man with the management of the dogs and the beats. That's one thing Lord Ailine will do for me, I hope: I hope he will let me have a word about the man that's coming in my place; I would not like to have a cantankerous ill-tempered brute of a fellow coming in to have charge of my dogs. They're the bonniest lot in Sutherlandshire.'

All this was practical enough; and meanwhile she had set to work to clear the table, to make way for Maggie. When the young handmaiden appeared with the tea-things he left the room for a few minutes, and presently returned with a polecat-skin, carefully dressed and smoothed, in his hand.

'Here's a bit thing,' said he, 'I wish ye would take, if it's of any use to you. Or if ye could tell me anything ye wished it made into, I could have that done when I go south. And if your mother would like one or two of the deer-skins, I'm sure she's welcome to them; they're useful about a house.'

'Indeed, you are very kind, Ronald,' said she, flushing somewhat, 'and too kind, indeed—for you know that ever since we have known you all these kindnesses have always been on one side—and—and—we have never had a chance of doing anything in return for you ——'

'Oh, nonsense,' said he good-naturedly. 'Well, there is one thing your father could do for me—if he would take my gun, and my rifle, and rods and reels, and just keep them in good working order, that would be better than taking them to Glasgow and getting them spoiled with rust and want of use. I don't want to part with them altogether; for they're old friends; and I would like to have them left in safe keeping——'

She laughed lightly.

'And that is your way of asking a favour—to offer my father the loan of all these things. Well, I am sure he will be very glad to take charge of them——'

'And to use them,' said he, 'to use them; for that is the sure way of keeping them in order.'

'But perhaps the new keeper may not be so friendly?'

'Oh, I will take care about that,' said he confidently; 'and in any case you know it was his lordship said your father might have a day on the Mudal-Water whenever he liked. And what do you think, now, about the little skin there?'

'I think I will keep it as it is—just as you have given it to me,' she said simply.

In due course they had tea together; but that afternoon or evening meal is a substantial affair in the north—cold beef, ham, scones, oatmeal cake, marmalade, jam, and similar things all making their appearance—and one not to be lightly hurried over. And Meenie was so much at home now; and there was so much to talk over; and she was so hopeful. Of course, Ronald must have holiday-times, like other people; and where would he spend these, if he did not come back to his old friends? And he would have such chances as no mere stranger could have, coming

through on the mail-cart and asking everywhere for a little trout-fishing. Ronald would have a day or two's stalking from Lord Ailine; and there was the loch; and Mudal-Water; and if the gentlemen were after the grouse, would they not be glad to have an extra gun on the hill for a day or two, just to make up a bag for them?

'And then,' said Meenie, with a smile, 'who knows but that Ronald may in time be able to have a shooting of his own? Stranger things have happened.'

When tea was over and the things removed he lit his pipe, and the girls took to their knitting. And never, he thought, had Meenie looked so pretty and pleased and quickly responsive with her clear and happy eyes. He forgot all about Mrs. Douglas's forecast as to the future estate of her daughter; he forgot all about the Stuarts of Glengask and Orosay; this was the Meenie whom Mudal knew, whom Clebrig had charge of, who was the friend and companion of the birds and the wild-flowers and the summer streams. What a wonderful thing it was to see her small fingers so deftly at work; when she looked up the room seemed full of light and entrancement; her sweet low laugh found an echo in the very core of his heart. And they all of them, for this one happy evening, seemed to forget that soon there was to be an end. They were together; the world shut out; the old harmony re-established, or nearly re-established; and Meenie was listening to his reading of 'the Eve of St. Agnes'—in the breathless hush of the little room—or she was praying, and in vain, for him to bring his pipes and play 'Lord Lovat's Lament,' or they were merely idly chatting and laughing, while the busy work of the fingers went on. And sometimes he sate quite silent, listening to the other two; and her voice seemed to fill the

room with music; and he wondered whether he could carry away in his memory some accurate recollection of the peculiar, soft, rich tone, that made the simplest things sound valuable. It was a happy evening.

But when she rose to go away she grew graver; and as she and Ronald went along the road together—it was very dark, though there were a few stars visible here and there—she said to him in rather a low voice—

'Well, Ronald, the parting between friends is not very pleasant, but I am sure I hope it will all be for the best, now that you have made up your mind to it. And every one seems to think you will do well.'

'Oh, as for that,' said he, 'that is all right. If the worst comes to the worst, there is always the Black Watch.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, they're always sending the Forty-Second into the thick of it, no matter what part of the world the fighting is, so that a man has a good chance. I suppose I'm not too old to get enlisted; sometimes I wish I had thought of it when I was a lad—I don't know that I would like anything better than to be a sergeant in the Black Watch. And I'm sure I would serve three years for no pay at all if I could only get one single chance of winning the V.C. But it comes to few; it's like the big stag—it's there when ye least expect it; and a man's hand is not just always ready, and steady. But I'm sure ye needna bother about what's going to happen to me—that's of small account.'

'It is of very great account to your friends, at all events,' said she valiantly, 'and you must not forget, when you are far enough away from here, that you have friends here who are thinking of you and always wishing you well. It will be easy for you to forget; you will have all kinds of things to

do, and many people around you; but the others here may often think of you, and wish to hear from you. It is the one that goes away that has the best of it, I think—among the excitement of meeting strange scenes and strange faces——'

'But I am not likely to forget,' said he, rather peremptorily; and they walked on in silence.

Presently she said—

'I have a little album that I wish you would write something in before you go away altogether.'

'Oh yes, I will do that,' said he, 'and gladly.'

'But I mean something of your own,' she said rather more timidly.

'Why, but who told you——'

'Oh, every one knows, surely!' said she. 'And why should you conceal it? There were the verses that you wrote about Mrs. Semple's little girl—I saw them when I was at Tongue last—and indeed I think they are quite beautiful: will you write out a copy of them in my album?'

'Or something else, perhaps,' said he—for instantly it flashed upon him that it was something better than a mere copy that was needed for Meenie's book. Here, indeed, was a chance. If there was any inspiration to be gained from these wild hills and straths and lonely lakes, now was the time for them to be propitious; would not Clebrig—the giant Clebrig—whose very child Meenie was—come to his aid, that so he might present to her some fragment of song or rhyme not unworthy to be added to her little treasury?

'I will send for the book to-morrow,' said he.

'I hope it will not give you too much trouble,' said she,

as they reached the small gate, 'but it is very pleasant to turn over the leaves and see the actual writing of your friends, and think of when you last saw them and where they are now. And that seems to be the way with most of our friends; I suppose it is because we have moved about so; but there is scarcely any one left—and if it was not for a letter occasionally, or a dip into that album, I should think we were almost alone in the world. Well, good-night, Ronald—or will you come in and have a chat with my father?'

'I am afraid it is rather late,' he said.

'Well, good-night.'

'Good-night, Miss Douglas,' said he, and then he walked slowly back to his home.

And indeed he was in no mood to turn to the scientific volumes that had already arrived from Glasgow. His heart was all afire because of the renewal of Meenie's kindness; and the sound of her voice was still in his ears; and quite naturally he took out that blotting-pad full of songs and fragments of songs, to glance over them here and there, and see if amongst them there was any one likely to recall to him when he was far away from Inver-Mudal the subtle mystery and charm of her manner and look. And then he began to think what a stranger coming to Inver-Mudal would see in Meenie? Perhaps only the obvious things—the pretty oval of the cheek and chin, the beautiful proud mouth, the wide-apart contemplative eyes? And perhaps these would be sufficient to attract? He began to laugh with scorn at this stranger—who could only see these obvious things—who knew nothing about Meenie, and the sweetness of her ways, her shrewd common-sense and the frank courage and honour of her mind. And what if she were to turn coquette

under the influence of this alien admiration? Or perhaps become sharply proud? Well, he set to work—out of a kind of whimsicality—and in time had scribbled out this—

FLOWER AUCTION.

Who will buy pansies?
There are her eyes,
Dew-soft and tender,
Love in them lies.

Who will buy roses?
There are her lips,
And there is the nectar
That Cupidon sips.

Who will buy lilies?
There are her cheeks,
And there the shy blushing
That maidhood bespeaks.

'Meenie, Love Meenie,
What must one pay?'
'Good stranger, the market's
Not open to-day!'

He looked at the verses again and again; and the longer he looked at them the less he liked them—he scarcely knew why. Perhaps they were a little too literary? They seemed to lack naturalness and simplicity; at all events, they were not true to Meenie; why should Meenie figure as a flippant coquette? And so he threw them away and turned to his books—not the scientific ones—to hunt out something that was like Meenie. He came near it in Tannahill, but was not quite satisfied. A verse or two in Keats held his fancy for a moment. But at last he found what he wanted in Wordsworth—

> '*A violet by a mossy stone*
> *Half hidden from the eye;*
> *—Fair as a star, when only one*
> *Is shining in the sky.*'

Yes; that was liker Meenie—who 'dwelt among the untrodden ways.'

CHAPTER V.

A LESSON IN FLY-FISHING.

Miss Carry Hodson returned from Paris in a very radiant mood; she had had what she called a real good time, and everything connected with the wedding had gone off most successfully. Her dress, that she had ordered long before she came to the Highlands, was a perfect fit; Lily Selden made the most charming and beautiful of brides; and no less a person than a prince (rather swarthy, and hailing from some mysterious region east of the Carpathians) had proposed the health of the bridesmaids, and had made especial mention of the young ladies who had travelled long distances to be present on the auspicious occasion.

However, on the morning after her return to Inver-Mudal her equanimity was somewhat dashed. When she went along the passage to the little hall—to see what the morning was like outside—she found waiting there a respectable-looking elderly Highlander, with grizzled locks, who touched his cap to her, and who had her waterproof over his arm. This last circumstance made her suspicious; instantly she went back to her father.

'Who is that man?' she asked.

'What man?'

'Why, an old man, who is waiting there, and he has got my waterproof slung over his arm.'

'Well, I suppose that is the new gillie.'

'Isn't Ronald going down?' she said, with very evident disappointment.

'Of course not,' her father said, with some sharpness. 'I think you have taken up enough of his time. And just now, when he is getting ready to go away, do you think I could allow him to waste day after day in attending to us? Seems to me it would be more to the point if you put your small amount of brain into devising some means of squaring up with him for what he has done already.'

'Oh, very well,' she said—or rather, what she did really say was 'Oh, vurry well'—and the pretty, pale, attractive face resumed its ordinary complacency, and she went off to make friends with the new gillie. She was on good terms with the old Highlander in about a couple of minutes; and presently they were on their way down to the loch, along with the lad John. Her father was to follow as soon as he had finished his letters.

But she was now to discover, what she had never discovered before, that salmon-fishing on a loch is a rather monotonous affair, unless the fish are taking very freely indeed. For one thing, the weather had settled down into a fine, clear, spring-like calm and quiet that was not at all favourable to the sport. It was very beautiful, no doubt; for sometimes for hours together the lake would be like a sheet of glass—the yellow shores and purple birch-woods all accurately doubled, with nearer at hand the faint white reflections of the snow-peaks in the north stretching out into the soft and deep blue; and when a breath of wind, from some unexpected point of the com-

pass, began to draw a sharp line of silver between earth and water, and then came slowly across the loch to them, ruffling out that magic inverted picture on its way, the breeze was deliciously fresh and balmy, and seemed to bring with it tidings of the secret life that was working forward to the leafiness of summer. They kept well out into the midst of this spacious circle of loveliness, for old Malcolm declared they would be doing more harm than good by going over the fishing-ground; so she had a sufficiently ample view of this great panorama of water and wood and far mountain-slopes. But it grew monotonous. She began to think of Paris, and the brisk, busy days—a hurry of gaiety and pleasure and interest using up every possible minute. She wished she had a book—some knitting—anything. Why, when Ronald was in the boat—with his quick sarcastic appreciation of every story she had to tell, or every experience she had to describe—there was always enough amusement and talking. But this old man was hopeless. She asked him questions about his croft, his family, his sheep and cows; and he answered gravely; but she took no interest in his answers, as her father might have done. She was unmistakably glad to get ashore for lunch—which was picturesque enough, by the way, with that beautiful background all around; and neither her father nor herself was in any hurry to break up the small picnic-party and set to work again.

Nor did they do much better in the afternoon—though her father managed to capture a small eight-pounder; and so, in the evening, before dinner, she went along to Ronald to complain. She found him busy with his books; his gun and cap and telescope lying on the table beside him, showed that he had just come in.

'Ay,' said he, 'it's slow work in weather like this. But will ye no sit down?' and he went and brought her a chair.

'No, I thank you,' said she; 'I came along to see if you thought there was likely to be any change. Is your glass a good one?'

'First-rate,' he answered, and he went to the small aneroid and tapped it lightly. 'It was given me by a gentleman that shot his first stag up here. I think he would have given me his head, he was so pleased. Well, no, Miss Hodson, there's not much sign of a change. But I'll tell ye what we'll do, if you're tired of the loch, we'll try one or two of the pools on the Mudal.'

'You mean the river down there?'

'There's not much hope there either—for the water's low the now; but we might by chance get a little wind, or there are some broken bits in the stream——'

'But you mean with a fly—how could I throw a fly?' she exclaimed.

'Ye'll never learn younger,' was the quiet answer. 'It there's no change to-morrow I'll take ye up the river myself—and at least ye can get some practice in casting——'

'Oh no, no,' said she hurriedly, 'thank you very much, but I must not take up your time——'

'I'm no so busy that I cannot leave the house for an hour or two,' said he—and she understood by his manner that he was 'putting his foot down,' in which case she knew she might just as well give in at once. 'But I warn ye that it's a dour river at the best, and not likely to be in good ply; however, we might just happen on one.' And then he added, by way of explanation, 'If we should, it will have to be sent to Lord Ailine, ye understand.'

'Why?'

'Because the river doesna belong to your fishing; it goes with the shooting.'

'Oh,' said she, somewhat coldly. 'And so, when Lord Ailine gives any one a day's fishing he claims whatever fish they may catch?'

'When his lordship gives a day's fishing he does not; but when the keeper does—that's different,' was the perfectly simple and respectful answer.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' said she hastily, and sincerely hoping she had said nothing to wound his feelings. Apparently she had not, for he proceeded to warn her about the necessity of her putting on a thick pair of boots; and he also gently hinted that she might wear on her head something less conspicuous than the bright orange Tam o' Shanter of which she seemed rather fond.

Accordingly, next morning, instead of sending him a message that she was ready, she walked along to the cottage, accoutred for a thorough stiff day's work. The outer door was open, so she entered without ceremony; and then tapped at the door of the little parlour, which she proceeded to open also. She then found that Ronald was not alone; there was a young man sitting there, who instantly rose as she made her appearance. She had but a momentary glimpse of him, but she came to the conclusion that the gamekeepers in this part of the world were a good-looking race, for this was a strongly-built young fellow, keen and active, apparently, with a rather pink and white complexion, closely-cropped head, bright yellow moustache, and singularly clear blue eyes. He wore a plain tweed suit; and as he rose he picked up a billycock hat that was lying on the table.

'I'll see you to-night, Ronald,' said he, 'I'm going off by the mail again to-morrow.'

And as he passed by Miss Carry, he said, very modestly and respectfully—

'I hope you will have good sport.'

'Thank you,' said she, most civilly, for he seemed a well-mannered young man, as he slightly bowed to her in passing, and made his way out.

Ronald had everything ready for the start.

'I'm feared they'll be laughing at us for trying the river on so clear a day,' said he, as he put his big fly-book in his pocket. 'And there's been no rain to let the fish get up.'

'Oh I don't mind about that,' said she, as he held the door open, and she went out, 'it will be more interesting than the lake. However, I've nothing to say against the lake fishing, for it has done such wonders for my father. I have not seen him so well for years. Whether it is the quiet life, or the mountain air, I don't know, but he sleeps perfectly, and he has entirely given up the bromide of potassium. I do hope he will take the shooting and come back in the autumn.'

'His lordship was saying there were two other gentlemen after it,' remarked Ronald significantly.

'Who was saying?'

'His lordship—that was in the house the now when ye came in.'

'Was that Lord Ailine?' she said—and she almost paused in their walk along the road.

'Oh yes.'

'You don't say! Why, how did he come here?'

'By the mail this morning.'

'With the country people?'

'Just like anybody else,' he said.

'Well, I declare! I thought he would have come with a coach and outriders—in state, you know——'

'What for?' said he impassively. 'He had no luggage, I suppose, but a bag and a waterproof. It's different in the autumn, of course, when all the gentlemen come up, and there's luggage and the rifles and the cartridge-boxes—then they have to have a brake or a waggonette.'

'And that was Lord Ailine,' she said, half to herself; and there was no further speaking between them until they had gone past the Doctor's cottage and over the bridge and were some distance up 'the strath that Mudal laves'—to quote her companion's own words.

'Now,' said he, as he stooped and began to put together the slender grilse-rod, 'we'll just let ye try a cast or two on this bit of open grass—and we'll no trouble with a fly as yet.'

He fastened on the reel, got the line through the rings, and drew out a few yards' length. Then he gave her the rod; showed her how to hold it; and then stood just behind her, with his right hand covering hers.

'Now,' said he, 'keep your left hand just about as steady as ye can—and don't jerk—this way——'

Of course it was really he who was making these few preliminary casts, and each time the line ran out and fell straight and trembling on the grass.

'Now try it yourself.'

At first she made a very bad job of it—especially when she tried to do it by main force; the line came curling down not much more than the rod's length in front of her, and the more she whipped the closer became the curls.

'I'm afraid I don't catch on quite,' she said, unconsciously adopting one of her father's phrases.

'Patience—patience,' said he; and again he gripped her hand in his and the line seemed to run out clear with the gentlest possible forward movement.

And then he put out more line—and still more and more—until every backward and upward swoop of the rod, and every forward cast, was accompanied by a 'swish' through the air. This was all very well; and she was throwing a beautiful, clean line; but she began to wonder when the bones in her right hand would suddenly succumb and be crunched into a jelly. The weight of the rod—which seemed a mighty engine to her—did not tell on her, for his one hand did the whole thing; but his grip was terrible; and yet she did not like to speak.

'Now try for yourself,' said he, and he stepped aside.

'Wait a minute,' she said—and she shook her hand, to get the life back into it.

'I did not hurt you?' said he, in great concern.

'We learn in suffering what we teach in song,' she said lightly. 'If I am to catch a salmon with a fly-rod, I suppose I have got to go through something.'

She set to work again; and, curiously enough, she seemed to succeed better with the longer line than with the short one. There was less jerking; the forward movement was more even; and though she was far indeed from throwing a good line, it was very passable for a beginner.

'You know,' said she, giving him a good-humoured hint, 'I don't feel like doing this all day.'

'Well, then, we'll go down to the water now,' said he, and he took the rod from her.

They walked down through the swampy grass and heather to the banks of the stream; and here he got out

his fly-book—a bulged and baggy volume much the worse for wear. And then it instantly occurred to her that this was something she could get for him—the most splendid fly-book and assortment of salmon flies to be procured in London—until it just as suddenly occurred to her that he would have little use for these in Glasgow. She saw him select a smallish black and gold and crimson-tipped object from that bulky volume; and a few minutes thereafter she was armed for the fray, and he was standing by watching.

Now the Mudal, though an exceedingly 'dour' salmon-river, is at least easy for a beginner to fish, for there is scarcely anywhere a bush along its level banks. And there were the pools—some of them deep and drumly enough in all conscience; and no doubt there were salmon in them, if only they could be seduced from their lair. For one thing, Ronald had taken her to a part of the stream where she could not, in any case, do much harm by her preliminary whippings of the water.

She began—not without some little excitement, and awful visions of triumph and glory if she should really be able to capture a salmon by her own unaided skill. Of course she caught in the heather behind her sometimes; and occasionally the line would come down in a ghastly heap on the water; but then again it would go fairly out and over to the other bank, and the letting it down with the current and drawing it across—as he had shown her in one or two casts—was a comparatively easy matter. She worked hard, at all events, and obeyed implicitly—until alas! there came a catastrophe.

'A little bit nearer the bank if you can,' said he; 'just a foot nearer.'

She clenched her teeth. Back went the rod with all her

might—and forward again with all her might—but midway and overhead there was a mighty crack like that of a horse-whip; and calmly he regarded the line as it fell on the water.

'The fly's gone,' said he—but with not a trace of vexation.

'Oh, Ronald, I'm so sorry!' she cried, for she knew that these things were expensive, even where they did not involve a considerable outlay of personal skill and trouble.

'Not at all,' said he, as he quietly sate down on a dry bunch of heather and got out his book again. 'All beginners do that. I'll just show ye in a minute or two how to avoid it. And we'll try a change now.'

Indeed she was in no way loth to sit down on the heather too; and even after he had selected the particular Childers he wanted, she took the book, and would have him tell her the names of all the various flies, which, quite apart from their killing merits, seemed to her beautiful and interesting objects. And finally she said—

'Ronald, my arms are a little tired. Won't you try a cast or two? I am sure I should learn as much by looking on.'

He did as he was bid; and she went with him; but he could not stir anything. The river was low; the day was clear; there was no wind. But at last they came to a part of the stream where there was a dark and deep pool, and below that a wide bed of shingle, while between the shingle and the bank was a narrow channel where the water tossed and raced before breaking out into the shallows. He drew her a little bit back from the bank and made her take the rod again.

'If there's a chance at all, it's there,' he said. 'Do ye

see that stone over there?—well, just try to drop the fly a foot above the stone, and let it get into the swirl.'

She made her first cast—the line fell in a tangled heap about three yards short.

'Ye've got out of the way of it,' said he, and he took the rod from her, let out a little more line, and then gave it to her again, standing behind her, with his hand over-gripping hers.

'Now!'

The fly fell a foot short—but clean. The next cast it fell at the precise spot indicated, and was swept into the current, and dragged slowly and jerkily across. Again he made the cast for her, with the same negative result; and then he withdrew his hand.

'That's right—very well done!' he said, as she continued.

'Yes, but what's the use when you have tried——'

She had scarcely got the words out when she suddenly found the line held tight—and tighter—she saw it cut its way through the water, up and towards the bank of the pool above—and down and down was the point of the rod pulled until it almost touched the stream. All this had happened in one wild second.

'Let the line go!—what are ye doing, lassie?' he cried.

The fact was that in her sudden alarm she had grasped both line and rod more firmly than ever; and in another half second the fish must inevitably have broken something. But this exclamation of his recalled her to her senses—she let the line go free—got up the rod—and then waited events—with her heart in her mouth. She had not long to wait. It very soon appeared to her as if she had hooked an incarnate flash of lightning; for there was nothing this

beast did not attempt to do; now rushing down the narrow channel so close to the bank that a single out-jutting twig must have cut the line; now lashing on the edge of the shallows; twice jerking himself into the air; and then settling down in the deep pool, not to sulk, but to twist and tug at the line in a series of angry snaps. And always it was 'Oh, Ronald, what shall I do now?' or 'Ronald, what will he do next?'

'You're doing well enough,' said he placidly. 'But it will be a long fight; and ye must not let him too far down the stream, or he'll take ye below the foot bridge. And don't give him much line; follow him, rather.'

She was immediately called on to act on this advice; for with one determined, vicious rush, away went the salmon down the stream—she after him as well as her woman's skirts would allow, and always and valorously she was keeping a tight strain on the pliant rod. Alas! all of a sudden her foot caught in a tuft of heather—down she went, prone, her arms thrown forward so that nothing could save her. But did she let go the rod? Not a bit! She clung to it with the one hand; and when Ronald helped her to her feet again, she had no thought of herself at all—all her breathless interest was centred on the salmon. Fortunately that creature had now taken to sulking, in a pool farther down; and she followed him, getting in the line the while.

'But I'm afraid you're hurt,' said he.

'No, no.'

Something was tickling the side of her face. She shifted the grip of the rod, and passed the back of her right hand across her ear; a brief glance showed her that her knuckles were stained with blood. But she took no further heed; for she had to get both hands on the rod again.

'She has pluck, that one,' Ronald said to himself; but he said nothing aloud, he wanted her to remain as self-possessed as possible.

'And what if he goes down to the footbridge, Ronald?' she said presently.

'But ye must not let him.'

'But if he will go?'

'Then ye'll give me the rod and I'll take it under the bridge.'

The fish lay there as heavy and dead as a stone; nothing they could do could stir him an inch.

'The beast has been at this work before,' Ronald said. 'That jagging to get the hook out is the trick of an old hand. But this sulking will never do at all.'

He left her and went farther up the stream to the place where the river ran over the wide bed of shingle. There he deliberately walked into the water—picking up a few pebbles as he went—and, with a running leap, crossed the channel and gained the opposite bank. Then he quickly walked down to within a yard or two of the spot where the 'dour' salmon lay.

She thought this was very foolish child's play that he should go and fling little stones at a fish he could not see. But presently she perceived that he was trying all he could to get the pebbles to drop vertically and parallel with the line. And then the object of this device was apparent. The salmon moved heavily forward, some few inches only. Another pebble was dropped. This time the fish made a violent rush up stream that caused Miss Carry's reel to shriek; and off she set after him (but with more circumspection this time as regards her footing), getting in the line as rapidly as possible as she went. Ronald now came

over and joined her, and this was comforting to her nerves.

Well, long before she had killed that fish she had discovered the difference between loch-fishing and river-fishing; but she did kill him in the end; and mightily pleased she was when she saw him lying on the sere wintry grass. Ronald would have had her try again; but she had had enough; it was past lunch time, and she was hungry; moreover, she was tired; and then again she did not wish that he should waste the whole day. So, when she had sate down for a while, and watched him tie the salmon head and tail, they set out for the village again, very well content; while as for the slight wound she had received by her ear catching on a twig of heather when she fell, that was quite forgotten now.

'And ye are to have the fish,' said he. 'I told his lordship this morning you were going to try your hand at the casting; and he said if you got one you would be proud of it, no doubt, and ye were to keep it, of course.'

'Well, that is very kind; I suppose I must thank him if I see him?'

And she was very curious to know all about Lord Ailine; and why he should come to Inver-Mudal merely for these few hours; and what kind of people he brought with him in the autumn. He answered her as well as he could; and then they went on to other things—all in a very gay and merry mood, for he was as proud as she was over this achievement.

At the same moment Meenie Douglas was in her own little room, engaged on a work of art of a not very ambitious kind. She had lying before her on the table a pencil-sketch in outline of such features of the landscape as could be seen

from the window—the loch, the wooded promontories, Ben Clebrig, and the little clump of trees that sheltered the inn; and she was engaged in making a smaller copy of this drawing, in pen and ink, on a paper-cutter of brown wood. She was not much of an artist, perhaps; but surely these simple outlines were recognisable; and if they were to be entitled '*A Souvenir*,' and carried away to the south as a little parting present, might they not in some idle moment of the future recall some brief memory of these northern wilds? So she was at work on this task—and very careful that the lines should be clear and precise—when she heard the sound of voices without—or rather one voice, which presently she recognised to be Ronald's: she could not easily mistake it. And if she were to go to the window and get him to stop for a minute at the gate, and show him the sketch that she had just about finished—perhaps he would be pleased?

She went to the window—but instantly drew back. She had just caught a glimpse: it was the American young lady he was walking with—at a time when he was supposed to be so busy; and he was carrying her rod for her and her ulster as well as the salmon; and they were laughing and gaily talking together, like a pair of lovers almost on this clear spring day. Meenie went slowly back to the table—her face perhaps a trifle paler than usual; and she sate down, and began to look at the little drawing that she had been rather proud of. But her lips were proud and firm. Why should she give a drawing to any one—more especially to one who was so ready with his friendship and so quick to consort with strangers? The lines on the brown wood seemed cold and uninteresting; she was no longer anxious that they should suggest an accurate picture; nay, she pushed the thing away from her, and rose, and went back

to the window, and stood idly gazing out there, her lips still proud, her mien defiant.

And then—well, Ronald was going away. Was it worth while to let pride or self-love come between them and be-cloud these last few days, when perhaps they might never see each other again? For well she knew of her mother's aims and hopes with regard to herself; and well she knew that—whatever she may have guessed from the verses of Ronald's which assuredly had never been meant for her to see—it was neither for him nor for her to expect that the harsh facts and necessities of the world should give place and yield to a passing fancy, a dream, a kind of wistful, half-poetic shadow of what otherwise might have been. But at least Ronald and she might part friends; nay, they should part friends. And so she returned to the table—overmastering her momentary pride; and she took up the discarded little drawing and regarded it with gentler eyes. For, after all (as she could not forget) Ronald was going away.

CHAPTER VI.

POETA . . . NON FIT.

It soon became obvious that the salmon-fishers from the other side of the Atlantic had got into a long spell of deplorably fine weather; and a gentle melancholy settled down upon the souls of the gillies. In vain, morning after morning, the men searched every quarter of the heavens for any sign of even a couple of days' deluge to flood the rivers and send the kelts down and bring the clean salmon up from the sea. This wild and bleak region grew to be like some soft summer fairyland; the blue loch and the yellow headlands, and the far treeless stretches of moor lay basking in the sunlight; Ben Loyal's purples and browns were clear to the summit; Ben Clebrig's snows had nearly all melted away. Nor could the discontented boatmen understand how the two strangers should accept this state of affairs with apparent equanimity. Both were now provided with a book; and when the rods had been properly set so as to be ready for any emergency, they could pass the time pleasantly enough in this perfect stillness, gliding over the smooth waters, and drinking in the sweet mountain air. As for Miss Carry, she had again attacked the first volume of Gibbon—for she would not be beaten; and very startling indeed it was when a

fish did happen to strike the minnow, to be so suddenly summoned back from Palmyra to this Highland loch. In perfect silence, with eyes and attention all absented, she would be reading thus—

'*When the Syrian queen was brought into the presence of Aurelian, he sternly asked her, how she had presumed to rise in arms against the Emperor of Rome? The answer of Zenobia was a prudent mixture of respect and firmness*'—when sharp would come the warning cry of Malcolm—'There he is, Miss!—there he is!'—and she would dash down the historian to find the rod being violently shaken and the reel screaming out its joyous note. Moreover, in this still weather, the unusual visitor not unfrequently brought some other element of surprise with him. She acquired a considerable experience of the different forms of foul-hooking and of the odd manœuvres of the fish in such circumstances. On one occasion the salmon caught himself on the minnow by his dorsal fin; and for over an hour contented himself with rolling about under water without once showing himself, and with such a strain that she thought he must be the champion fish of the lake: when at last they did get him into the boat he was found to be a trifle under ten pounds. But, taken altogether, this cultivation of literature, varied by an occasional 'fluke' of a capture, and these placid and dreamlike mornings and afternoons, were far from being as satisfactory as the former and wilder days when Ronald was in the boat, even with all their discomforts of wind and rain and snow.

By this time she had acquired another grievance.

'Why did you let him go, pappa, without a single word?' she would say, as they sate over their books or newspapers in the evening. 'It was my only chance. You could

easily have introduced yourself to him by speaking of the shooting——'

'You know very well, Carry,' he would answer—trying to draw her into the fields of common sense—'I can say nothing about that till I see how mother's health is.'

'I am sure she would say yes if she saw what the place has done for you, pappa; salmon-fishing has proved better for you than bromide of potassium. But that's not the trouble at all. Why did you let him go? Why did you let him spend the evening at the Doctor's?—and the next morning he went about the whole time with Ronald! My only chance of spurning a lord, too. Do they kneel in this country, pappa, when they make their declaration; or is that only in plays? Never mind; it would be all the same. "No, my lord; the daughter of a free Republic cannot wed a relic of feudalism; farewell, my lord, farewell! I know that you are heart-broken for life; but the daughter of a free Republic must be true to her manifest destiny."'

'Oh, be quiet!'

'And then the girls at home, when I got back, they would all have come crowding around: "Do tell, now, did you get a British nobleman to propose, Carry?" "What do you imagine I went to Europe for?" "And you rejected him?" "You bet your pile on that. Why, you should have seen him writhe on the floor when I spurned him! I spurned him, I tell you I did—the daughter of a free Republic"——'

'Will you be quiet!'

'But it was really too bad, pappa!' she protested. 'There he was lounging around all the morning. And all I heard him say was when he was just going—when he was on the mail-car, "Ronald," he called out, "have you got a

match about you?"—and he had a wooden pipe in his hand. And that's all I know about the manners and conversation of the British nobility; and what will they say of me at home?'

'When does Ronald go?' he would ask; and this, at least, was one sure way of bringing her back to the paths of sanity and soberness; for the nearer that this departure came, the more concerned she was about it, having some faint consciousness that she herself had a share of the responsibility.

And in another direction, moreover, she was becoming a little anxious. No message of any kind had arrived from the *Chicago Citizen.* Now she had written to Miss Kerfoot before she left for Paris; her stay in the French capital had extended to nearly three weeks; there was the space occupied in going and returning; so that if Jack Huysen meant to do anything with the verses it was about time that that should appear. And the more she thought of it the more she set her heart on it, and hoped that Ronald's introduction to the reading public would be a flattering one and one of which he could reasonably be proud. Her father had it in his power to secure his material advancement; and that was well enough; but what if it were reserved for her to confer a far greater service on him? For if this first modest effort were welcomed in a friendly way, might he not be induced to put forth a volume, and claim a wider recognition? It need not interfere with his more practical work; and then, supposing it were successful? Look at the status it would win for him—a thing of far more value in the old country, where society is gradated into ranks, than in her country, where every one (except hotel clerks, as she insisted) was on the same plane.

He would then be the equal of anybody—even in this old England; she had at least acquired so far a knowledge of English society. And if he owed the first suggestion and impulse to her?—if she were to be the means, in however small and tentative a fashion, of his ultimately establishing his fame? That he could do so if he tried, she never thought of doubting. She saw him every day, and the longer she knew him the more she was certain that the obvious mental force that seemed to radiate from him in the ordinary conversation and discussion of everyday life only wanted to be put into a definite literary channel to make its mark. And was not the time ripe for a poet? And it was not Edinburgh, or Glasgow, or London that had nowadays to decide on his merits, but two great continents of English-speaking people.

At length came the answer to her urgent prayer—a letter from Miss Kerfoot and a copy of the *Chicago Citizen*. The newspaper she opened first; saw with delight that a long notice—a very long notice indeed—had been accorded to the verses she had sent; and with a proud heart she put the paper in her pocket, for careful reading when she should get down to the lake. Miss Kerfoot's letter she glanced over; but it did not say much; the writer observed that Mr. Jack Huysen had only seemed half pleased when informed of Carry's extraordinary interest in the phenomenal Scotch gamekeeper; and, referring to the article in the *Citizen*, she said Jack Huysen had entrusted the writing of it to Mr. G. Quincy Regan, who was, she understood, one of the most cultured young men in Chicago, and likely to make quite a reputation for himself ere long. There were some other matters mentioned in this letter; but they need not detain us here.

Miss Carry was in very high spirits as she set forth from the inn with her father to walk down to the boats. They met Ronald, too, on their way; he was accompanied by the man who was to take his place after his leaving; and Miss Carry could not help comparing the two of them as they came along the road. But, after all, it was not outward appearance that made the real difference between men; it was mental stature; she had that in her pocket which could show to everybody how Ronald was a head and shoulders over any of his peers. And she took but little interest in the setting up of the rods or the selection of the minnows; she wanted to be out on the lake, alone, in the silence, to read line by line and word by word this introduction of her hero to the public.

The following is the article:

'A REMARKABLE LITERARY DISCOVERY—OUR FELLOW-CITIZENS ABROAD — ANOTHER RUSTIC POET — CHICAGO CLAIMS HIM. It may be in the recollection of some of our readers that a few years ago a small party of American tourists, consisting of Curtis H. Mack, who was one of our most distinguished major-generals in the rebellion, and is now serving on the Indian frontier; his niece, Miss Hettie F. Doig, a very talented lady and contributor to several of our best periodicals; and John Grimsby Patterson, editor of the Baltimore *Evening News*, were travelling in Europe, when they had the good fortune to discover an Irish poet, Patrick Milligan, who had long languished in obscurity, no doubt the victim of British jealousy as well as of misrule. Major-General Mack interested himself in this poor man, and, in conjunction with William B. Stevens, of Cleveland, Ohio, had him brought over to this country, where they were eventually successful in obtaining for him a post-

mastership in New Petersburg, Conn., leaving him to devote such time as he pleased to the service of the tuneful nine. Mr. Milligan's Doric reed has not piped to us much of late years; but we must all remember the stirring verses which he wrote on the occasion of Colonel George W. Will's nomination for Governor of Connecticut. It has now been reserved for another party of American travellers, still better known to us than the above, for they are no other than our esteemed fellow-citizen, Mr. Josiah Hodson and his brilliant and accomplished daughter, Miss Caroline Hodson, to make a similar discovery in the Highlands of Scotland; and in view of such recurring instances, we may well ask whether there be not in the mental alertness of our newer civilisation a capacity for the detection and recognition of intellectual merit which exists not among the deadening influences of an older and exhausted civilisation. It has sometimes been charged against this country that we do not excel in arts and letters; that we are in a measure careless of them; that political problems and material interests occupy our mind. The present writer, at least, is in no hurry to repel that charge, odious as it may seem to some. We, as Americans, should remember that the Athenian Republic, with which our western Republic has nothing to fear in the way of comparison, when it boasted its most lavish display of artistic and literary culture, was no less conspicuous for its moral degeneracy and political corruption. It was in the age of Pericles and of Phidias, of Socrates and Sophocles, of Euripides and Aristophanes and Thucydides, that Athens showed herself most profligate; private licence was unbridled; justice was bought and sold; generals incited to war that they might fill their pockets out of the public purse; and all this spectacle in striking

contrast with the manly virtues of the rude and unlettered kingdom of Sparta, whose envoys were laughed at because they had not the trick of Athenian oratory and casuistry. We say, then, that we are not anxious to repel this charge brought against our great western Republic, that we assign to arts and letters a secondary place; on the contrary, we are content that the over-cultivation of these should fatten on the decaying and effete nations of Europe, as phosphorus shines in rotten wood.'

Now she had determined to read every sentence of this article conscientiously, as something more than a mere intellectual treat; but, as she went on, joy did not seem to be the result. The reference to Patrick Milligan and the postmastership in Connecticut she considered to be distinctly impertinent; but perhaps Jack Huysen had not explained clearly to the young gentleman all that she had written to Emma Kerfoot? Anyhow, she thought, when he came to Ronald's little Highland poem, he would perhaps drop his Athenians, and talk more like a reasonable human being.

'That the first strain from the new singer's lyre should be placed at the services of the readers of the *Citizen*, we owe to the patriotism of the well-known and charming lady whose name we have given above; nor could the verses have fallen into better hands. In this case there is no need that Horace should cry to Tyndaris—

O matre pulchrâ filia pulchrior,
Quem criminosis cunque voles modum
Pones iambis, sive flammâ
Sive mari libet Hadriano.

Moreover, we have received a hint that this may not be the last piece of the kind with which we may be favoured; so that we have again to thank our fair fellow-townswoman

for her kindly attention. But lest our readers may be growing weary of this *prolegomenon*, we will at once quote this latest utterance of the Scottish muse which has come to us under such favourable auspices :'

Here followed Ronald's poor verses, that perhaps looked insignificant enough, after this sonorous trumpet-blaring. The writer proceeded :

'Now certain qualities in this composition are so obvious that we need hardly specify them ; we give the writer credit for simplicity, pathos, and a hearty sympathy with the victims of the tyrannical greed of the chase-loving British landlord. But it is with no intent of looking a gift-horse in the mouth (which would be a poor return for the courtesy of the lady who has interested herself in the rustic bard) if we proceed to resolve this piece into its elements, that we may the more accurately cast the horoscope of this new applicant for the public applause. To begin with, the sentiment of nostalgia is but a slender backbone for any work of literary art. In almost every case it is itself a fallacy. What were the conditions under which these people—arbitrarily and tyrannically, it may have been—were forced away from their homes? Either they were bad agriculturists or the land was too poor to support them ; and in either case their transference to a more generous soil could be nothing but a benefit to them. Their life must have been full of privations and cares. *Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit* ; but the pleasure ought to lie in thinking of the escape ; so that we maintain that to base any piece of literary work on such a false sentiment as nostalgia is seen to be, leads us to suspect the *veracity* of the writer and calls upon us to be on our guard. Moreover, we maintain that it is of the essence of pastoral and

idyllic poetry to be cheerful and jocund; and it is to be observed that sadness prevails in poetry only when a nation has passed its youth and becomes saturated with the regret of old age. We prefer the stories told

Where Corydon and Thyrsis met
Are at their savoury dinner set;

and the lyrist when he sings

Dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
Dulce loquentem;

and we hold that when the poets of a nation are permeated by a lackadaisical sentiment—when they have the candour to style themselves the idle singers of an empty day—when the burden of their song is regret and weariness and a lamentation over former joys—then it is time for such poets and the nation they represent to take a back seat in the lecture halls of literature, and give way to the newer and stronger race that is bound to dominate the future.'

She read no farther; and it is a great pity that she did not; for the writer by and by went on to say some very nice things about these unlucky verses; and even hinted that here was a man who might be benefited by coming to stay in Chicago,—'the future capital of the future empire of the world,'—and by having his eyes opened as to the rate of progress possible in these modern days; and wound up with a most elaborate compliment to the intellectual perspicacity and judgment of Miss Carry herself. She did not read beyond what is quoted above for the simple reason that she was in a most violent rage, and also extremely mortified with herself for being so vexed. She tore the newspaper into shreds, and crushed these together, and flung them into the bottom of the boat. Her cheeks were quite pale; her eyes burning; and through all the anger of

her disappointment ran the shame of the consciousness that it was she who had exposed Ronald to this insult. What though he should never know anything about it? Her friends in Chicago would know. And it was the man whom she wanted to glorify and make a hero of who had, through her instrumentality, been subjected to the pedantic criticism, the pretentious analyses, and, worst of all, the insulting patronage of this unspeakable ass. Suddenly she regretted the destruction of the newspaper; she would like to have looked at it again, to justify her wrath. No matter; she could remember enough; and she would not forget Jack Huysen's share in this transaction.

She was very silent and reserved at lunch time; and her father began to believe that, after all, in spite of her repeated assurances, their ill-luck with the fishing was weighing on her spirits.

'You know, Carry,' said he, 'it is not in the nature of things that weather like this can last in the Highlands of Scotland. It is notoriously one of the wettest places in the world. There *must* be rain coming soon; and then think of all the fish that will be rushing up in shoals, and what a time we shall have.'

'I am not disappointed with the fishing at all, pappa,' she said. 'I think we have done very well.'

'What is the matter, then?'

'Oh, nothing.'

And then she said—

'Well, I will tell you, pappa. I asked Jack Huysen to do me a very particular favour; and he did not do it; and when I next see Jack Huysen, I think he will find it a very cold day.'

The words were mysterious; but the tone was enough.

And all the afternoon she sate in the stern of the coble and brooded, composing imaginary letters to the editor of the *New York Herald*, to the editor of the *Nation*, to the editor of the Chicago *Tribune*, to the editor of *Puck*, and a great many other journals, all of these phantom epistles beginning 'As an American girl I appeal to you,' and proceeding to beg of the editor to hold up to merciless scorn a certain feeble, shallow, and impertinent article (herewith enclosed) which had appeared in the *Chicago Citizen*. And on the way home, too, in the evening, she began to question her father as to his personal acquaintance with editors and journalists, which seemed to be of the slightest; and she at length admitted that she wanted some one to reply—and sharply—to an article that had been written about a friend of hers.

'You let that alone,' her father said. 'It's not very easy for any one to meddle in the politics of our country without coming out more or less tattooed; for they don't mind what they say about you; and you are very well to be out of it.'

'It isn't politics at all,' she said. 'And—and—the article is written about a friend of mine—and—I want to have the writer told what a fool he is.'

'But probably he would not believe it,' her father said quietly.

'He would see that some one else believed it.'

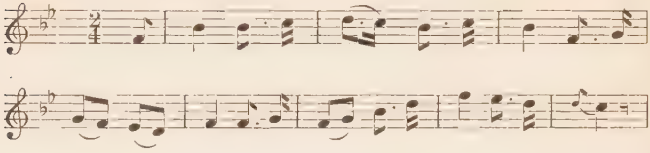
'I am not sure that that would hurt him much,' was the unsatisfactory answer.

When they drew near to Inver-Mudal she found herself quite afraid and ashamed at the thought of their possibly meeting Ronald. Had she not betrayed him? He had sought for no recognition; probably he was too proud or

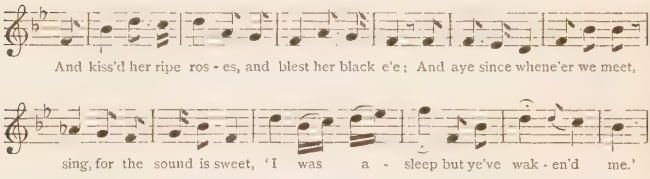
too manly and careless about what any one might write of him; it was she who had put him into that suppliant attitude, and brought upon him the insolent encouragement of a microcephalous fool. This was the return she had made him for all his kindness to her father and to herself. Why, he had told her to burn the verses! And to think that she should have been the means of submitting them to the scrutiny and patronage of this jackanapes—and that Mr. J. C. Huysen should as good as say 'Well, this is what we think of your prodigy'—all this was near bringing tears of rage to her eyes. For Miss Carry, it must be repeated, was 'a real good fellow,' and very loyal to her friends, and impatient of injustice done them; and perhaps, unconsciously to herself, she may have felt some of the consternation of the wild animal whose duty it is to protect her mate with her superior feminine watchfulness, and who, through neglect or carelessness, allows the destroyer to come in and slay. In any case, it certainly promised to be 'a very cold day' for Mr. Jack Huysen when these two should meet in Chicago.

That night, after dinner, father and daughter went out for a stroll; for by this time the moon was drawing to its full again; and all the world lay peaceful and silent in the wan clear light. They had not emerged from the trees in front of the inn on to the white pathway of the road when a sound in the distance caught Miss Carry's ears, and instantly she touched her father's arm and drew him back into the shadow. She wanted to hear what song this was that Ronald was singing on his homeward way.

At first she could make out nothing but fragments of the air—clear and soft and distant—



but as he drew nearer the words become more distinct:



So clear and penetrating and careless and joyous was this singing!—her heart was stirred with pride as she listened; this was not the voice of a man who would trouble himself with any whipper-snapper criticism;—nay, she began to wonder that she had wasted so much indignation on so trivial a thing. Then there was a sudden silence, except for his footfall; and presently the dark figure appeared out there on the white road—his shadow a sharp black in front of him, the little terrier trotting behind him—and in a minute or so the long swinging stride had carried him past their ambush on his homeward way to the cottage.

'What a splendid voice that fellow has got!' her father said, as they also now went out on to the white highway, and took the opposite direction.

'He seems to be very well contented with himself,' she said, rather absently.

CHAPTER VII.

A LAST DAY ON THE LOCH.

RONALD came down to the loch-side the next morning just as she was about to get into the coble—her father having started a few minutes before.

'I hear you have not been doing very well with the fishing,' said he, in that brisk, business-like fashion of his.

'The salmon appear to have gone away somewhere,' she replied.

'Oh, but that will never do,' said he cheerfully. 'We must try and make some alteration.'

He took the key of the kennels from his pocket.

'Here, Johnnie lad, ye may go and take the dogs out for a run.'

Was Ronald, then, coming with her? Her eyes brightened with anticipation; there was a welcome in the look of her face that ought to have been sufficient reward for him. Nor had she the courage to protest—though she knew that his time was drawing short now. As for the salmon—well, it was not about salmon she was thinking exclusively.

'They say a change of gillie sometimes brings a change of luck,' said he good-naturedly; and he began to overhaul the tackle, substituting smaller minnows for those already on. 'And I think we will try down at the other end of

the loch this time. We will make sure of some trout in any case.'

'But it is so far away, Ronald; are you certain you can afford the time?' she was bound, in common fairness, to ask.

'Oh yes, I can afford the time,' said he, 'even if this should have to be my last day on the loch. Besides, if we do not treat you well, maybe you'll never come back.'

'And what is the use of our coming back, when you won't be here?' she was on the point of saying, but she did not say it, fortunately.

Then they set forth, on this still summer-like day; and they hailed the other boat in passing, and told them of their intended voyage of exploration. Indeed their prospects of sport at the setting out were anything but promising; the long levels of the lake were mostly of a pale glassy blue and white; and the little puffs of wind that stirred the surface here and there into a shimmer of silver invariably died down again, leaving the water to become a mirror once more of rock and tree and hill. But she was well content. This was an unknown world into which they were now penetrating; and it was a good deal more beautiful than the upper end of the lake (where the best fishing ground was) with which they had grown so familiar. Here were hanging woods coming right down to the water's edge; and lofty and precipitous crags stretching away into the pale blue sky; and winding bays and picturesque shores where the huge boulders, green and white and yellow with lichen, and the rich velvet moss, and the withered bracken, and the silver-clear stems of the birch trees were all brilliant in the sun. The only living creatures that seemed to inhabit this strange silent region were the birds. A pair of eagles

slowly circled round and round, but at so great a height that they were but a couple of specks which the eye was apt to lose; black-throated divers and golden-eyed divers, disturbed by these unusual visitors, rose from the water and went whirring by to the upper stretches of the lake; a hen-harrier hovered in mid-air, causing a frantic commotion among the smaller birds beneath; the curlews, now wheeling about in pairs, uttered their long warning whistle; the peewits called angrily, flying zig-zag, with audible whuffing of their soft broad wings; the brilliant little redshanks flew like a flash along the shore, just skimming the water; and two great wild-geese went by overhead, with loud, harsh croak. And ever it was Ronald's keen eye that first caught sight of them; and he would draw her attention to them; and tell her the names of them all. And at last—as they were coming out of one of the small glassy bays, and as he was idly regarding the tall and rocky crags that rose above the birchwoods—he laughed lightly.

'Ye glaiket things,' said he, as if he were recognising some old friends, 'what brings ye in among the sheep?'

'What is it, Ronald?' she asked—and she followed the direction of his look towards those lofty crags, but could make out nothing unusual.

'Dinna ye see the hinds?' he said quietly.

'Where—where?' she cried, in great excitement; for she had not seen a single deer all the time of her stay.

'At the edge of the brown corrie—near the sky-line. There are three of them—dinna ye see them?'

'No, I don't!' she said impatiently.

'Do ye see the two sheep?'

'I see two white specks—I suppose they're sheep.'

'Well—just above them.'

But the boat was slowly moving all this time; and presently the gradual change in their position brought one of the hinds clear into view on the sky-line. The beautiful creature, with its graceful neck, small head, and upraised ears, was evidently watching them, but with no apparent intention of making off; and presently Miss Carry, whose eyes were becoming better accustomed to the place, could make out the other two hinds, one of them lying on the grass, the other contentedly feeding, and paying no heed whatever to the passing boat.

'I thought you said the sheep drove them away,' she said to him.

'It's the men and the dogs mostly,' he answered. 'Sometimes they will come in among the sheep like that, if the feeding tempts them. My word, that would be an easy stalk now—if it was the season.'

Very soon they found that the three hinds were no longer in view; but there were plenty of other things to claim their attention on this solitary voyage. What, for example, was this great circular mass of stones standing on a projecting promontory? These were the remains, he explained to her, of a Pictish fort. Another, in better preservation, was on the opposite shore; and, if she cared to visit it, she might make her way into the hollow passages constructed between the double line of wall, if she were not afraid of adders, nor yet of some of the uncemented stones falling upon her.

'And what are these?' she said, indicating the ruins of certain circles formed on the hill-plateaux just above the loch.

'They're down in the Ordnance Survey as "hut-circles,"' he said, 'but that is all I know about them.'

'At all events, there must have been plenty of people living here at one time?'

'I suppose so.'

'Well, I don't think I ever saw any place in our country looking quite so lonely as that,' she said, regarding the voiceless solitudes of wood and hill and crag. 'Seems as if with us there was always some one around—camping out, or something—but I dare say in Dacotah or Idaho you would get lonelier places than this even. Well, now, what do they call it?' she asked, as an afterthought.

'What?—the strath here?'

'Yes.'

'I suppose they would call it part of Strath-Naver.'

The mere mention of Strath-Naver struck a chill to her heart. It recalled to her how she had betrayed him by sending those harmless verses across the Atlantic, and subjecting them to the insolence of a nincompoop's patronage. And if Ronald should ever get to know? Might not some busybody send him a copy of the paper? These Scotch people had so many relatives and friends all through the States. Or perhaps his brother in Glasgow might have some correspondent over there? She dared not look him in the face, she felt so guilty; and once or twice she was almost on the point of confessing everything, and begging for his forgiveness, and getting him to promise that he would not read the article should it ever be sent to him.

And then it occurred to her as a very strange thing that from the moment of Ronald's appearance that morning at the loch-side until now she had never even given a thought to what had caused her so much annoyance the day before. His very presence seemed to bring with it an atmosphere

of repose and safety and self-confidence. When she had seen him go stalking by on the previous night, she had instantly said to herself—'Oh, that is not the kind of man to worry about what is said of him.' And this morning, when he came down to the boat, she had never thought of him as a criticised and suffering poet, but as—well, as the Ronald that all of them knew and were familiar with—self-reliant, good-natured, masterful in his way, and ever ready with a laugh and a song and a jest, save when there was any young lady there, to make him a little more demure and respectful in his manner. Ronald a disappointed poet? —Ronald suffering agony because a two-for-a-quarter kind of a creature out there in Chicago did not think well of him? She ventured to lift her eyes a little. He was not looking her way at all. He was regarding the shore intently; and there was a quiet and humorous smile on the hard-set, sun-tanned face.

'There are six—seven—blackcocks; do ye see them?'

'Oh yes; what handsome birds they are!' she said, with a curious sense of relief.

'Ay,' said he, 'the lads are very friendly amongst themselves just now; but soon there will be wars and rumours of wars when they begin to set up house each for himself. There will be many a pitched battle on those knolls there. Handsome? Ay, they're handsome enough; but handsome is as handsome does. The blackcock is not nearly as good a fellow as the grousecock, that stays with his family, and protects them, and gives them the first warning cry if there's danger. These rascals there wander off by themselves, and leave their wives and children to get on as they can. They're handsome—but they're ne'er-do-weels. There's one thing: the villain has a price put on his head;

for a man would rather bring down one old cock thumping on the grass than fill his bag with gray hens.'

A disappointed poet indeed! And she was so glad to find him talking in his usual half-bantering careless fashion (that he should talk in any other way was only a wild suggestion of her own conscience, struck with a qualm on the mention of Strath-Naver) that she made many inquiries about the habits of black game and similar creatures; and was apparently much interested; and all the while was vowing within herself that she would think no more of the mortifying disappointment she had met with, but would give up this last day on the loch wholly to such fancies and quiet amusements as she would like to look back upon in after hours.

And a very pleasant day they spent in this still, silent, beautiful region, cut off from all of the world, as it were. There were plenty of trout, and therefore there was plenty of occupation; moreover, one or two good-sized sea-trout added to the value of the basket. Nor was this solitary district quite so untenanted as she had supposed. About mid-day it occurred to her that she was becoming hungry and then the wild reflection flashed on her that the lunch was in the other boat—some eight miles away. She confided her perplexity—her despair—to Ronald.

'It is my fault,' he said, with vexation very visible in his face. 'I should have remembered. But—but—' he added timidly—for he was not accustomed to ministering to the wants of young ladies—'I could get ye some bread and a drink of milk, if that would do.'

'What, right here?'

'Yes.'

'Why, nothing could be better!'

They were rowing the boat ashore by this time; and when they had got to land, he leaped on to the beach, and presently disappeared. In little more than a quarter of an hour he was back again, bringing with him a substantial loaf of home-made bread and a large jug of milk.

'Well done!' she said. 'There's plenty for all of us. Lend me your knife, Ronald.'

'Oh no,' said he, 'it's for you.'

And a hard fight she had of it ere she could get the two men to accept a fair division; but she had her way in the end; and Ronald, seeing that she was determined they should share the milk also (she drank first, and handed the jug to him quite as a matter of course), swiftly and stealthily pulled off the cup from his whisky-flask, and old Malcolm and he drank from that, pouring the milk into it from the jug. It was a frugal picnic; but she was very happy; and she was telling him that when he came to Chicago, and they were showing him the beauties of Lake Michigan, they might give him a grander luncheon than this, but none more comfortable.

In the afternoon they set out for home, picking up a few more trout by the way; and when they at length drew near to the upper waters of the lake they found the other boat still pursuing its unwearied round. Moreover Mr. Hodson's strict attention to business had been rewarded by the capture of a handsome fish of sixteen pounds; whereas they had nothing but a miscellaneous collection of brown and white trout. But, just as they were thinking of going ashore, for the dusk was now coming on, a most extraordinary piece of luck befell them. Miss Carry was scarcely thinking of the rods when the sudden shriek of one of the reels startled her out of her idle contemplation.

'Surely that is a salmon, Ronald!' she cried, as she instantly grasped the rod and got it up.

He did not stay to answer, for his business was to get in the other line as fast as possible. But he had just got this second rod into his hand when lo! there was a tugging and another scream of a reel—there was now a salmon at each of the lines! It was a position of the direst danger—for a single cross rush of either of the fish must inevitably break both off—and how were they to be kept separate, with both rods confined to one boat? Ronald did not lose his head.

'Row ashore, Malcolm—row ashore, man!' he shouted—'fast as ever ye can, man!'

Nor did he wait until the bow had touched land; he slipped over the edge of the boat while as yet the water was deep enough to take him up to the waist; and away he waded, taking the one rod with him, and slowly increasing the distance between the two fish. By the time he got ashore there was a hundred yards or so between them, and he did not attempt to play this salmon at all; he gave it plenty of law; and merely waited to see the end of Miss Carry's struggle.

She hardly knew what had happened, except that Ronald's going away had left her very nervous and excited and helpless. How was she ever to land a fish unless he was at her shoulder directing her? But by this time old Malcolm had jammed the bow of the boat on to the beach, had got in the oars, and now sate patiently waiting, clip in hand.

The fish was not a very game one, though he was no kelt.

'Put a good strain on him, Miss,' said old Malcolm—who had been taking a sly look round. 'Ronald's keeping the other one for ye.'

'What do you say?' she called to him—rather breathlessly.

'Ronald will be wanting ye to play the other fish too,' said the old man. 'And a wonderful fine thing, if we can get them both—oh yes, indeed. It is not an ordinary thing to hook two salmon at once and land them both—I wass neffer seeing that done except once before.'

'Beast!' she said, between her teeth—for the fish made a desperate rush away out into the loch, with a magnificent flourish in the air as a finish. But no harm was done; indeed, it was about his last strong effort to free himself. Yard after yard of the line was got in again; his struggles to get away grew less and less vigorous; at last the old Highlander made an adventurous swoop with the clip, and was successful in landing the brilliant creature in the bottom of the boat.

'Now, Miss,' he cried, 'leave him to me—leave him to me. Quick, get ashore, and try for the other one. And will you take the clip?'

He was greatly excited by this unusual adventure; and so was she—and breathless, moreover; but she managed to do as she was bid. She got rather wet in getting ashore; for Ronald was not there to help her; but she had no time to mind that; she made her way as rapidly as she could along the bank, and there was Ronald awaiting her, with a quiet smile on his face.

'This is better work,' said he placidly, as he gave her the rod.

She was anxious no longer; she was triumphant. Ronald was with her; of course she would get this one also. And who but Ronald would have brought such a stroke of luck to the boat?

'I would get in some of the line now,' said he calmly. 'I have been letting him do as he liked; and he is a long way out. And mind, you'll have to watch him; he is quite fresh; there has been no fighting at all yet.'

'Oh, Ronald,' she said, with the pretty pale face grown quite rosy with the excitement and the hard work, 'won't it be just too splendid for anything if we can get them both!'

'I hope ye may,' he said, 'for it's not likely to happen again in your lifetime.'

The fish now began to rebel against the new strain that was being put on him, and indulged in a variety of audacious cantrips—apparently at a considerable distance out. By this time the other boat was also ashore, and Miss Carry's father came along to see how Ronald's pupil could play a salmon. Just as he drew near, there was a pretty lively scrimmage going on.

'Why, you want to have them all,' he complained. 'It is not fair sport to bag a brace of salmon right and left.'

She did not answer—in fact, she could not; she had enough to do. For now the salmon seemed wanting to get right out to the middle of the lake; and the length of line that lay between her and her enemy dragged heavily on her arms. And then he altered his tactics—coming rapidly to the surface and trying to break the suddenly slackened line by furious lashings of his tail. But all this was in vain; and now, as he seemed yielding a little, she put a heavier strain on him, and began to reel up. It was very well done, and without a word of admonition; for Ronald was proud of his pupil, and wished to show that he could leave her to herself.

By and by the fish began to show himself a little more amenable, and preparations were made for receiving him

on shore. Miss Carry stepped back a few yards; her father got out of the way altogether; Ronald crouched down, clip in hand. Of course, when the salmon found himself being guided into the shallows, he was off like a bolt; and again and again he repeated these sullen rushes; but each time they were growing weaker; and at last, as the gleam of something white showed in the water, Ronald made a sudden plunge with the clip—and the salmon was ashore.

He laughed.

'I suppose this will be my last day on the loch, and a very good finish it is.'

The men brought along the other fish, and these were all laid out on the grass side by side, though it was now too dark to see much of them. As regards the three salmon, Mr. Hodson's, on being accurately weighed, was found to be sixteen and a half pounds, Miss Carry's two respectively fourteen pounds and eleven pounds. She was a very happy young woman as she walked home with her father and Ronald through the now rapidly gathering dusk.

His last day on the lake:—well, it would be something pleasant to look back upon in after times—the summer-like weather, the still water, the silent and sunlit crags and woods and bays. And perhaps, too, he would remember something of her bright society, her friendly disposition, and the frank good-comradeship with which she shared her meal of milk and bread with two common boatmen. Nay, he could not well help remembering that—and with a touch of gratitude and kindness, too—even though they should never meet again through the long years of life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARTING.

Now amid all his preparations for departure nothing distressed him so much as the difficulty he found in trying to write something worthy of being placed in Meenie's book. It was to be his last gift to her; she herself had asked for it; surely he ought to do his best? And perhaps it was this very anxiety that baffled him. Even of such small lyrical faculty as he possessed, he was in no sense the master. He could write easily enough at the instigation of some passing fancy; but the fancy had to come uncalled-for; it was not of his summoning. And now, in this hour of direst need, no kindly Ariel would come to help him. Walking across the lonely moors, with the dogs for his sole companions, or lying on a far hillside, and tearing twigs of heather with his teeth, he worried his brain for a subject, and all to no purpose. Perhaps, if praise of Meenie had been permissible—if he could have dared to write anything about herself in her own book—he might have found the task more easy; for that was the one direction in which his imagination was always facile enough. One morning, indeed, when he was coming down the Clebrig slopes, he saw Miss Carry and Meenie walking together along the road; and he had not much difficulty in shaping out some

such verses as these—jingling the rhymes together without much concern about the sense, and then scribbling the result on the back of an envelope to see how it looked:

By Mudal's river she idly strayed,
And drank afresh the morning breeze:
Tell me, you beautiful dark-eyed maid,
That's come across the Atlantic seas—

See you our winsome Sutherland flower,
Her cheek the tint of the summer rose,
Her gold-brown hair her only dower,
Her soul as white as Ben Clebrig's snows;

Blue as the ruffled loch her eyes,
Sweet her breath as the blossoming heather:
O do you think the whole world's skies
Can see aught fairer than you together?

Sisters twain—one slender and dark,
Her cheek faint-tanned by the tropic south;
One northern bred, her voice like a lark,
The joy of the hills in her gladsome youth.

Ben Clebrig shall judge—nay, shall keep the two,
And bind them in chains of love for ever;
Look to it, Clebrig; guard them true:
Sisters twain—and why should they sever?

But even here there was a false note; and he knew it. Perhaps he was vaguely jealous of any alien interference: was not Meenie the sole and only care of the giant mountain? Anyhow, the verses were of no avail for Meenie's book; and otherwise he did not care for them; so the envelope was crumpled up and thrown away.

On the evening before the brother and sister were to leave for the south, Meenie came along to see them. Ronald had got quite accustomed to find Miss Douglas in the house of late; for Maggie needed a good deal of direction and help—the tearful little lass being sorely

distraught at the thought of going away. But on this occasion it was himself she had come to seek.

'I have made a little drawing for you, Ronald,' said she —and the beautiful Highland eyes were downcast a little —'as well as I could, of the loch and the hills and the river; and I want you to take it to Glasgow with you, and put it on the mantelpiece of your room, and then sometimes it will make you think of the old place and of us all.'

'I'm sure it will not need a picture to make me do that,' said he, 'but all the same I am obliged to ye, and it will be the chief treasure in the house——'

'Oh no, oh no,' she said, with a rueful smile—and she ventured to raise her eyes. 'You must not think it a picture at all—but only a few lines scribbled on a paper-knife to make you remember the place when you happen to find it lying about. And you must not look at it until I have gone, because you would feel bound to praise it; and that would be as awkward for you as for me—for indeed it is nothing at all. And here,' she added, producing a small slip of paper, 'is my sister's address in Glasgow; and I have written to her; and she will be very glad if you will call on them when you have the time.'

'I don't know how to thank ye,' said he. 'It's when people are going away that they find out how many friends they are leaving behind.'

'In your case,' said she, very modestly and prettily, 'it is not difficult to count—you have only to say the whole country-side.' And then she added: 'I heard of the lads that came all the way from Tongue.'

'The wild fellows!—they had a long tramp here and back home again.'

She looked at him rather hesitatingly.

'There will be a great many coming to see you off to-morrow morning, Ronald,' she said.

'I should think not—I should think not,' he said.

'Oh, but I know there will be. Every one is talking of it. And I was thinking—if it was not too much trouble—if you were not too busy—I was wondering if you would come along and say good-bye to my father and mother this evening—I would rather have that than—than—with a crowd of people standing by——'

'Oh yes, certainly,' he said, at once. 'When will I come? Now, if ye like.'

'And Maggie too?'

'Yes, yes, why not?'

'And about my album, Ronald?'

'Well,' said he, with not a little embarrassment, 'I have not written anything in it yet; but I will give it to you in the morning; and—and if there's nothing in it, then ye must just understand that I could not get anything good enough, and I will send something from Glasgow——'

'Indeed no,' said she promptly. 'Why should you trouble about a thing like that? Write your name in the book, Ronald, and that will be enough.'

The three of them now went outside, and the door was shut behind them. It was a beautiful night; the moon was slowly rising over the solitudes of Strath-Terry; and the lake was like a sheet of silver. They were rather silent as they walked along the gray highway; to-morrow was to make a difference to all of their lives.

When they reached the Doctor's cottage, and when Ronald and Maggie were ushered into the parlour, it was clear that the visit had been expected; for there was cake on the table, and there were plates and knives, and a

decanter of sherry, and a number of wine-glasses. And not only was the big good-humoured Doctor as friendly as ever, but even the awe-inspiring little Dresden-china lady condescended, in these unusual circumstances, to be gracious. Of course the talk was all about Ronald's going away, and his prospects in Glasgow, and so forth; and Mrs. Douglas took care to impress him with the fact that, on the occasion of Lord Ailine having recently spent an evening with them, his lordship had distinctly approved of the step Ronald had taken, and hoped it might turn out well in every way.

'Will there be any office work, Ronald?' the Doctor asked.

'I suppose so, for a time.'

'You'll not like that, my lad.'

'I'll have to take what comes, like other folk,' was the simple answer.

How pretty Meenie was on this last evening! She did not say much; and she hardly ever looked at him; but her presence, then as ever, seemed to bring with it an atmosphere of gentleness and sweetness; and when, by chance, she did happen to regard him, there was a kind of magic wonder in her eyes that for the moment rather bedazzled him and made his answers to these good people's inquiries somewhat inconsecutive. For they were curious to know about his plans and schemes; and showed much interest in his welfare; while all the time he sate thinking of how strange Glasgow would be without the chance of catching a glimpse of Meenie anywhere; and wondering whether his dream-sweetheart—the imaginary Meenie whom he courted and wooed and won in these idle verses of his—would be nearer to him there, or would fade gradually away and finally disappear.

'In any case, Ronald,' said Mrs. Douglas—and she thus addressed him for the first time, 'you have a good friend in his lordship.'

'I know that.'

'I suppose I am breaking no confidence,' continued the little dame, in her grand way, 'in saying that he plainly intimated to us his willingness, supposing that you were not as successful as we all hope you may be—I say, his lordship plainly intimated to us that he would always have a place open for you somewhere.'

'Yes, I think he would do that,' Ronald said; 'but when a man has once put his hand to the plough he must not go back.'

And perhaps, for one feeble moment of indecision, he asked himself what had ever tempted him to put his hand to the plough, and to go away from this quiet security and friendliness and peace. But it was only for a moment. Of course, all that had been argued out before. The step had been taken; forwards, and not backwards, he must go. Still, to be sitting in this quiet little room—with the strange consciousness that Meenie was so near—watching the nimble, small fingers busy with her knitting—and wondering when she would raise those beautiful, deep, tender, clear eyes; and to think that on the morrow hour after hour would be placing a greater and greater distance between him and the possibility of any such another evening—nay, that it was not only miles but years, and perhaps a whole lifetime, that he was placing between her and him—that was no joyful kind of a fancy. If it had been Meenie who was going away, that would have been easier to bear.

'Call her back, Clebrig; Mudal, call;
Ere all of the young springtime be flown'

he would have cried to hill and river and loch and glen, knowing that sooner or later Love Meenie would come back from Glasgow Town. But his own going away was very different—and perhaps a final thing.

By and by he rose, and begged to be excused. Maggie might stay for a while longer with Miss Douglas, if she liked; as for him, he had some matters to attend to. And so they bade him good-bye, and wished him well, and hoped to hear all good things of him. Thus they parted; and he went out by himself into the clear moonlight night.

But he did not go home. A strange unrest and longing had seized him; a desire to be alone with the silence of the night; perhaps some angry impatience that he could not make out so much as a few trivial verses for this beautiful girl-friend whom he might never see again. He could write about his dream-sweetheart easily enough; and was there to be never a word for Meenie herself? So he walked down to the river; and wandered along the winding and marshy banks—startling many wildfowl the while—until he reached the lake. There he launched one of the cobles, and pulled out to the middle of the still sheet of water; and took the oars in again. By this time the redshank and curlews and plover had quieted down once more; there was a deadly stillness all around; and he had persuaded himself that he had only come to have a last look at the hills and the loch and the moorland wastes that Meenie had made magical for him in the years now left behind; and to bid farewell to these; and carry away in his memory a beautiful picture of them.

It was a lonely and a silent world. There was not a sound save the distant murmur of a stream; no breath of

wind came down from the Clebrig slopes to ruffle the broad silver sweeps of moonlight on the water; the tiny hamlet half hidden among the trees gave no sign of life. The cottage he had left—the white front of it now palely clear in the distance—seemed a ghostly thing: a small, solitary, forsaken thing, in the midst of this vast amphitheatre of hills that stood in awful commune with the stars. On such a night the wide and vacant spaces can readily become peopled; phantoms issue from the shadows of the woods and grow white in the open; an unknown wind may arise, bringing with it strange singing from the northern seas. And if he forgot the immediate purpose of the verses that he wanted; if he forgot that he must not mention the name of Meenie; if he saw only the little cottage, and the moonlit loch, and the giant bulk of Clebrig that was keeping guard over the sleeping hamlet, and watching that no sprites or spectres should work their evil charms within reach of Meenie's half-listening ear—well, it was all a fire in his blood and his brain, and he could not stay to consider. The phantom-world was revealed; the silence now was filled as with a cry from the lone seas of the far north; and, all impatient and eager and half bewildered, he seemed to press forward to seize those visions and that weird music ere both should vanish and be mute:—

The moonlight lies on Loch Naver,
And the night is strange and still;
And the stars are twinkling coldly
Above the Clebrig hill.

And there by the side of the water,
O what strange shapes are these!
O these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern seas.

And they stand in a magic circle,
Pale in the moonlight sheen;
And each has over her forehead
A star of golden green.

O what is their song?—of sailors
That never again shall sail;
And the music sounds like the sobbing
And sighing that brings a gale.

But who is she who comes yonder?—
And all in white is she;
And her eyes are open, but nothing
Of the outward world can she see.

O haste you back, Meenie, haste you,
And haste to your bed again;
For these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern main.

They open the magic circle;
They draw her into the ring;
They kneel before her, and slowly
A strange, sad song they sing—

A strange, sad song—as of sailors
That never again shall sail;
And the music sounds like the sobbing
And sighing that brings a gale.

O haste you back, Meenie, haste you,
And haste to your bed again;
For these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern main.

'O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
To our sea-halls draped with green;
O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
And be our rose-white queen!

'And you shall have robes of splendour,
With shells and pearls bestrewn;
And a sceptre olden and golden,
And a rose-white coral throne.

'And by day you will hear the music
Of the ocean come nigher and nigher;
And by night you will see your palace
Ablaze with phosphor fire.

'O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
To our sea-halls draped with green;
O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
And be our rose-white queen!'

But Clebrig heard; and the thunder
Down from his iron hand sped;
And the band of the wild witch-maidens
One swift shriek uttered, and fled.

And Meenie awoke, and terror
And wonder were in her eyes;
And she looked at the moon-white valley,
And she looked to the starlit skies.

O haste you back, Meenie, haste you,
And haste to your bed again;
For these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern main.

O hear you not yet their singing
Come faintly back on the breeze?—
The song of the wild witch-sisters
As they fly to the Iceland seas.

O hark—'tis a sound like the sobbing
And sighing that brings a gale:
A low, sad song—as of sailors
That never again shall sail!

Slowly he pulled in to the shore again, and fastened up the boat; and slowly he walked away through the silent and moonlit landscape, revolving these verses in his mind, but not trying in the least to estimate their value, supposing them to have any at all. Even when he had got home, and in the stillness of his own room—for by this time Maggie

had gone to bed—was writing out the lines, with apparent ease enough, on a large sheet of paper, it was with no kind of critical doubt or anxiety. He could not have written them otherwise; probably he knew he was not likely to make them any better by over-refining them. And the reason why he put them down on the large sheet of paper was that Meenie's name occurred in them; and she might not like that familiarity to appear in her album; he would fold the sheet of paper and place it in the book, and she could let it remain there or burn it as she chose. And then he went and had his supper, which Maggie had left warm by the fire, and thereafter lit a pipe—or rather two or three pipes, as it befel, for this was the last night before his leaving Inver-Mudal, and there were many dreams and reveries (and even fantastic possibilities) to be dismissed for ever.

The next morning, of course, there was no time or room for poetic fancies. When he had got Maggie to take along the little book to the Doctor's cottage, he set about making his final preparations, and here he was assisted by his successor, one Peter Munro. Finally he went to say good-bye to the dogs.

'Good-bye, doggies, good-bye,' said he, as they came bounding to the front of the kennel, pawing at him through the wooden bars, and barking and whining, and trying to lick his hand. 'Good-bye, Bess! Good-bye, Lugar—lad, lad, we've had many a day on the hill together.'

And then he turned sharply to his companion.

'Ye'll not forget what I told you about that dog, Peter?'

'I will not,' said the other.

'If I thought that dog was not to be looked after, I would get out my rifle this very minute and put a bullet

through his head—though it would cost me £7. Mind what I've told ye now; if he's not fed separate, he'll starve; he's that gentle and shy that he'll not go near the trough when the others are feeding. And a single cross word on the hill will spoil him for the day—mind you tell any strange gentlemen that come up with his lordship—some o' them keep roaring at dogs as if they were bull-calves. There's not a better setter in the county of Sutherland than that old Lugar—but he wants civil treatment.'

'I'll look after him, never fear, Ronald,' his companion said. 'And now come away, man. Ye've seen to everything; and the mail-gig will be here in half an hour.'

Ronald was still patting the dogs' heads, and talking to them—he seemed loth to leave them.

'Come away, man,' his companion urged. 'All the lads are at the inn, and they want to have a parting glass with you. Your sister and every one is there, and everything is ready.'

'Very well,' said he, and he turned away rather moodily.

But when they were descended from the little plateau into the highway he saw that Meenie Douglas was coming along the road—and rather quickly; and for a minute he hesitated, lest she should have some message for him.

'Oh, Ronald,' she said, and he hardly noticed that her face was rather pale and anxious, 'I wanted to thank you —I could not let you go away without thanking you—it—it is so beautiful——'

'I should beg your pardon,' said he, with his eyes cast down, 'for making use of your short name——'

'But, Ronald,' she said very bravely (though after a moment's hesitation, as if she had to nerve herself), 'whenever you think of any of us here, I hope you will think of me by that name always—and now, good-bye!'

He lifted his eyes to hers for but a second—for but a second only, and yet, perhaps, with some sudden and unforeseen and farewell message on his part, and on hers some swift and not overglad guessing.

'Good-bye!'

They shook hands in silence, and then she turned and went away; and he rejoined his companion and then they went on together. But Meenie did not re-enter the cottage. She stole away down to the river, and lingered by the bridge, listening. For there were faint sounds audible in the still morning air.

The mail-cart from the north came rattling along, and crossed the bridge, and went on towards the inn, and again there was silence, but for these faint sounds. And now she could make out the thin echoes of the pipes—no doubt one of the young lads was playing—*Lochiel's away to France*, perhaps, or *A Thousand Blessings*, for surely no one, on such an occasion, would think of *Macrimmon's Lament*—

> '*Macrimmon shall no more return*
> *Oh! never, never more return!*'

It would be something joyous they were playing there to speed him on his way; and the 'drink at the door'—the *Deoch an Dhoruis*—would be going the round; and many would be the hand-shaking and farewell. And then, by-and by, as she sate there all alone and listening, she heard a faint sound of cheering—and that was repeated, in a straggling sort of fashion; and thereafter there was silence. The mail-cart had driven away for the south.

Nor even now did she go back to the cottage. She wandered away through the wild moorland wastes—hour after hour, and aimlessly; and when, by chance, a shepherd

or crofter came along the road, she left the highway and went aside among the heather, pretending to seek for wild-flowers or the like: for sometimes, if not always, there was that in the beautiful, tender Highland eyes which she would have no stranger see.

CHAPTER IX.

SOUTHWARDS.

As for him, it was a sufficiently joyous departure; for some of the lads about were bent on accompanying him on the mail-car as far as Lairg; and they took with them John Macalpine and his weather-worn pipes to cheer them by the way; and at Crask they each and all of them had a glass of whisky; and on the platform at Lairg railway-station the clamour of farewell was great. And even when he had got quit of that noisy crew, and was in the third-class compartment, and thundering away to the south, his thoughts and fancies were eager and ardent and glad enough; and his brain was busy with pictures; and these were altogether of a joyful and hopeful kind. Already he saw himself on that wide estate—somewhere or other in the Highlands he fondly trusted; draining and planting and enclosing here; there pruning and thinning and felling; manufacturing charcoal and tar; planning temporary roads and bridges; stacking bark and faggots; or discussing with the head-keeper as to the desirability or non-desirability of reintroducing capercailzie. And if the young American lady and her father should chance to come that way, would he not have pleasure and pride in showing them over the place?—nay, his thoughts went farther afield, and he saw

before him Chicago, with its masts and its mighty lake, and himself not without a friendly grip of welcome on getting there. As for Meenie, where would she be in those coming and golden and as yet distant days? Far away from him, no doubt; and what else could he expect?—for now he saw her among the fine folk assembled at the shooting-lodge in Glengask—and charming all of them with her sweet and serious beauty and her gentle ways—and again he pictured her seated on the white deck of Sir Alexander's yacht, a soft south wind filling the sails, and the happy gray-blue Highland eyes looking forward contentedly enough to the yellow line of the Orosay shore. That was to be her future—fair and shining; for always he had associated Meenie with beautiful things—roses, the clear tints of the dawn, the singing of a lark in the blue; and who could doubt that her life would continue so, through these bright and freshly-coming years?

Yes, it was a glad enough departure for him; for he was busy and eager, and only anxious to set to work at once. But by and by, when the first novelty and excitement of the travelling was beginning to wear off, he suddenly discovered that the little Maggie, seated in the corner there, was stealthily crying.

'What, what, lass?' said he cheerfully. 'What is it now?'

She did not answer; and so he had to set to work to comfort her; making light of the change; painting in glowing colours all that lay before them; and promising that she should write to Miss Douglas a complete account of all her adventures in the great city. He was not very successful, for the little lass was sorely grieved over the parting from the few friends she had in the world; but at

least it was an occupation; and perhaps in convincing her he was likewise convincing himself that all was for the best, and proving that people should be well content to leave the monotony and dulness of a Highland village for the wide opportunities of Glasgow.

But even he, with all his eager hopes and ambitions, was chilled to the heart when at last they drew near to the giant town. They had spent the night in Inverness, for he had some business to transact there on behalf of Lord Ailine; and now it was afternoon—an afternoon dull and dismal, with an east wind blowing that made even the outlying landscape they had come through dreary and hopeless. Then, as they got nearer to the city, such suggestions of the country as still remained grew more and more grim; there were patches of sour-looking grass surrounded by damp stone walls; gaunt buildings soot-begrimed and gloomy; and an ever-increasing blue-gray mist pierced by tall chimneys that were almost spectral in the dulled light. He had been to Glasgow before, but chiefly on one or two swift errands connected with guns and game and fishing-rods; and he did not remember having found it so very melancholy-looking a place as this was. He was rather silent as he got ready for leaving the train.

He found his brother Andrew awaiting them; and he had engaged a cab, for a slight drizzle had begun. Moreover, he said he had secured for Ronald a lodging right opposite the station; and thither the younger brother forthwith transferred his things; then he came down the hollow-resounding stone stair again, and got into the cab, and set out for the Reverend Andrew's house, which was on the south side of the city.

And what a fierce and roaring Maelstrom was this into which they now were plunged! The dusky crowds of people, the melancholy masses of dark-hued buildings, the grimy flagstones, all seemed more or less phantasmal through the gray veil of mist and smoke; but always there arose the harsh and strident rattle of the tram-cars and the waggons and carts — a confused, commingled, unending din that seemed to fill the brain somehow and bewilder one. It appeared a terrible place this, with its cold gray streets and hazy skies, and its drizzle of rain; when, in course of time, they crossed a wide bridge, and caught a glimpse of the river and the masts and funnels of some ships and steamers, these were all ghost-like in the thin, ubiquitous fog. Ronald did not talk much, for the unceasing turmoil perplexed and confused him; and so the stout, phlegmatic minister, whose bilious-hued face and gray eyes were far from being unkindly in their expression, addressed himself mostly to the little Maggie, and said that Rosina and Alexandra and Esther and their brother James were all highly pleased that she was coming to stay with them, and also assured her that Glasgow did not always look so dull and miserable as it did then.

At length they stopped in front of a house in a long, unlovely, neutral-tinted street; and presently two rather weedy-looking girls, who turned out to be Rosina and Alexandra, were at the door, ready to receive the newcomers. Of course it was Maggie who claimed their first attention; and she was carried off to her own quarters to remove the stains of travel (and of tears) from her face; as for Ronald, he was ushered at once into the parlour, where his sister-in-law—a tall, thin woman, with a lachrymose face, but with sufficiently watchful eyes—greeted him in a

melancholy way, and sighed, and introduced him to the company. That consisted of a Mr. M'Lachlan—a large, pompous-looking person, with a gray face and short-cropped white hair, whose cool stare of observation and lofty smile of patronage instantly made Ronald say to himself, 'My good friend, we shall have to put you into your proper place;' Mrs. M'Lachlan, an insignificant woman, dowdily dressed; and finally, Mr. Weems, a little, old, withered man, with a timid and appealing look coming from under bushy black eyebrows—though the rest of his hair was gray. This Mr. Weems, as Ronald knew, was in a kind of fashion to become his coach. The poor old man had been half-killed in a railway-accident; had thus been driven from active duty; and now, with a shattered constitution and a nervous system all gone to bits, managed to live somehow on the interest of the compensation-sum awarded him by the railway-company. He did not look much of a hardy forester; but if his knowledge of land and timber measuring and surveying, and of book-keeping and accounts, was such as to enable him to give this stalwart pupil a few practical lessons, so far well; and even the moderate recompense would doubtless be a welcome addition to his income.

And now this high occasion was to be celebrated by a 'meat-tea,' for the Reverend Andrew was no stingy person, though his wife had sighed and sighed again over the bringing into the house of a new mouth to feed. Maggie came downstairs, accompanied by the other members of the family; Mr. M'Lachlan was invited to sit at his hostess's right hand; the others of them took their seats in due course; and the minister pronounced a long and formal blessing, which was not without a reference or two

to the special circumstances of their being thus brought together. And if the good man spoke apparently under the assumption that the Deity had a particular interest in this tea-meeting in Abbotsford Place, it was assuredly without a thought of irreverence; to himself the occasion was one of importance; and the way of his life led him to have continual—and even familiar—communion with the unseen Powers.

But it was not Ronald's affairs that were to be the staple of conversation at this somewhat melancholy banquet. It very soon appeared that Mr. M'Lachlan was an elder—and a ruling elder, unmistakably—of Andrew Strang's church, and he had come prepared with a notable proposal for wiping off the debt of the same.

'Ah'm not wan that'll gang back from his word,' he said, in his pompous and raucous voice, and he leaned back in his chair, and crossed his hands over his capacious black satin waistcoat, and gazed loftily on his audience. 'Wan hundred pounds—there it is, as sure as if it was in my pocket this meenit—and there it'll be when ye get fower ither members o' the congregation to pit doon their fifty pounds apiece. Not but that there's several in the church abler than me to pit doon as much; but ye ken how it is, Mr. Strang, the man makes the money and the woman spends it; and there's mair than one family we ken o' that should come forrit on an occasion like this, but that the money rins through the fingers o' a feckless wife. What think ye, noo, o' Mrs. Nicol setting up her pony-carriage, and it's no nine years since Geordie had to make a composition? And they tell me that Mrs. Paton's lasses, when they gang doon the watter—and not for one month in the year will they let that house o' theirs at Dunoon—

they tell me that the pairties and dances they have is jist extraordinar' and the wastry beyond a' things. Ay, it's them that save and scrimp and deny themselves that's expected to do everything in a case like this—notwithstanding it's a public debt—mind, it's a public debt, binding on the whole congregation; but what ah say ah'll stand to—there's wan hundred pounds ready, when there's fower ithers wi' fifty pounds apiece—that's three hundred pounds—and wi' such an example before them, surely the rest o' the members will make up the remaining two hundred and fifty—surely, surely.'

'It's lending to the Lord,' said the minister's wife sadly, as she passed the marmalade to the children.

The conversation now took the form of a discussion as to which of the members might reasonably be expected to come forward at such a juncture; and as Ronald had no part or interest in this matter he made bold to turn to Mr. Weems, who sate beside him, and engage him in talk on their own account. Indeed, he had rather taken a liking for this timorous little man, and wished to know more about him and his belongings and occupations; and when Mr. Weems revealed to him the great trouble of his life—the existence of a shrill-voiced chanticleer in the backyard of the cottage adjoining his own, out somewhere in the Pollokshaws direction—Ronald was glad to come to his help at once.

'Oh, that's all right,' said he. 'I'll shoot him for you.'

But this calm proposal was like to drive the poor little man daft with terror. His nervous system suffered cruelly from the skirling of the abominable fowl; but even that was to be dreaded less than a summons and a prosecution

and a deadly feud with his neighbour, who was a drunken, quarrelsome, cantankerous shoemaker.

'But, God bless me,' Ronald said, 'it's not to be thought of that any human being should be tortured like that by a brute beast. Well, there's another way o' settling the hash o' that screeching thing. You just go and buy a pea-shooter —or if one of the laddies will lend you a tin whistle, that will do; then go and buy twopence-worth of antibilious pills—indeed, I suppose any kind would serve; and then fire half a dozen over into the back-yard; my word, when the bantam gentleman has picked up these bonny looking peas, and swallowed them, he'll no be for flapping his wings and crowing, I'm thinking; he'll rather be for singing the tune of "Annie Laurie." But maybe you're not a good shot with a pea-shooter? Well, I'll come over and do it for you early some morning, when the beast's hungry.'

But it was difficult for any one to talk, even in the most subdued and modest way, with that harsh and strident voice laying down the law at the head of the table. And now the large-waistcoated elder was on the subject of the temperance movement; arraigning the government for not suppressing the liquor-traffic altogether; denouncing the callous selfishness of those who were inclined to temporise with the devil, and laying at their door all the misery caused by the drunkenness of their fellow-creatures; and proudly putting in evidence his own position in the city of Glasgow—his authority in the church—the regard paid to his advice—and the solid, substantial slice of the world's gear that he possessed—as entirely due to the fact that he had never, not even as a young man, imbibed one drop of alcohol. Now Ronald Strang was ordinarily a most abstemious person—and no credit to him, nor to any one

in the like case; for his firm physique and his way of living hitherto had equally rendered him independent of any such artificial aid (though a glass of whisky on a wet day on the hillside did not come amiss to him, and his hard head could steer him safely through a fair amount of jollification when those wild lads came down from Tongue). But he was irritated by that loud and raucous voice; he resented the man's arrogance and his domineering over the placid and phlegmatic Andrew, who scarcely opened his mouth; and here and there he began to put in a sharp saying or two that betokened discontent and also a coming storm. 'They used to say that cleanliness was next to godliness; but nowadays ye would put total abstinence half a mile ahead of it,' he would say, or something of the kind; and in due course these two were engaged in a battle-royal of discussion. It shall not be put down here; for who was ever convinced—in morals, or art, or literature, or anything else—by an argument? it needs only be said that the elder, being rather hard pressed, took refuge in Scriptural authority. But alas! this was not of much avail; for the whole family of the East Lothian farmer (not merely the student one of them) had been brought up with exceeding care, and taught to give chapter and verse for everything; so that when Mr. M'Lachlan sought to crush his antagonist with the bludgeon of quotation he found it was only a battledore he had got hold of.

'"Wine is a mocker; strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise,"' he would say severely.

'"Wine which cheereth God and man,'" the other would retort. '"Wine that maketh glad the heart of man." What make ye of these?'

'"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath babbling?—they that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine." What better authority can we have?'

'Ay, man, the wise king said that; but it wasna his last word. "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."'

'The devil quoting Scripture for his own ends,' the Reverend Andrew interposed, with a mild facetiousness.

'It's a dreadful thing to hear in a minister's house,' said the minister's wife, appealing to her neighbour, Mrs. M'Lachlan.

'What is? A verse from the Proverbs of Solomon?' Ronald said, turning to her quite good-naturedly.

But instantly he saw that she was distressed, and even more lachrymose than ever; and he knew that nothing would convince her that he was not a child of wrath and of the devil; and he reproached himself for having entered into any discussion of any kind whatever in this house, where Maggie was to live—he hoped in perfect accord and amity. As for himself, he wished only to be out of it. He was not in his right element. The vulgar complacency of the rich elder irritated him; the melancholy unreason of his sister-in-law depressed him. He foresaw that not here was any abiding-place for him while he sojourned in the great city.

But how was he to get away? They lingered and dawdled over their tea-drinking in a most astonishing fashion; his brother being the most intemperate of all of them, and obviously accounting thereby for his pallid and bilious cheeks. Moreover, they had returned to that fruitful topic of talk—the capability of this or the other member

of the congregation to subscribe to the fund for paying off the debt on the church; and as this involved a discussion of everybody's ways and means, and of his expenditure, and the manner of living of himself, his wife, his sons, and daughters and servants, the very air seemed thick with trivial and envious tittle-tattle, the women-folk, of course, being more loquacious than any.

'Lord help us,' said Ronald to himself, as he sate there in silence, 'this house would be a perfect paradise for an Income-tax Commissioner.'

However, the fourth or fifth tea-pot was exhausted at last; the minister offered up a prolonged thanksgiving; and Ronald thought that now he might get away—and out into the freer air. But that was not to be as yet. His brother observed that it was getting late; that all the members of the household were gathered together; and they might appropriately have family worship now. So the two servant-girls were summoned in to clear the table, and that done, they remained; the minister brought the family Bible over from the sideboard; and all sate still and attentive, their books in their hand, while he sought out the chapter he wanted. It was the Eighth of the Epistle to the Romans; and he read it slowly and elaborately, but without any word of comment or expounding. Then he said that they would sing to the praise of the Lord the XCIII. Psalm—himself leading off with the fine old tune of *Martyrdom;* and this the young people sang very well indeed, though they were a little interfered with by the uncertain treble of the married women and the bovine baritone of the elder. Thereafter the minister offered up a prayer, in which very pointed reference was made to the brother and sister who had come from the far mountains to dwell within the gates of the

city; and then all of them rose, and the maidservants withdrew, and those remaining who had to go began to get ready for their departure.

'Come over and see us soon again,' the minister said to him, as they followed him into the lobby; but the minister's wife did not repeat that friendly invitation.

'Ronald,' the little Maggie whispered—and her lips were rather tremulous, 'if you hear from Meenie, will you let me know?'

'But I am not likely to hear from her, lass,' said he, with his hand upon her shoulder. 'You must write to her yourself, and she will answer, and send ye the news.'

'Mind ye pass the public-houses on the way gaun hame,' said the elder, by way of finishing up the evening with a joke: Ronald took no notice, but bade the others good-bye, and opened the door and went out.

When he got into the street his first startled impression was that the world was on fire—all the heavens, but especially the southern heavens, were one blaze of soft and smoky blood-red, into which the roofs and chimney-stacks of the dusky buildings rose solemn and dark. A pulsating crimson it was, now dying away slightly, again gleaming up with a sudden fervour; and always it looked the more strange and bewildering because of the heavy gloom of the buildings and the ineffectual lemon-yellow points of the gas-lamps. Of course he remembered instantly what this must be—the glow of the ironworks over there in the south; and presently he had turned his back on that sullen radiance, and was making away for the north side of the city.

But when he emerged from the comparative quiet of the southern thoroughfares into the glare and roar of

Jamaica Street and Argyll Street, all around him there seemed even more of bewilderment than in the daytime. The unceasing din of tramway-cars and vans and carts still filled the air; but now there was everywhere a fierce yellow blaze of gaslight—glowing in the great stocked windows, streaming out across the crowded pavements, and shining on the huge gilded letters and sprawling advertisements of the shops. Then the people—a continuous surge, as of a river; the men begrimed for the most part, here and there two or three drunk and bawling, the women with cleaner faces, but most of them bareheaded, with Highland shawls wrapped round their shoulders. The suffused crimson glow of the skies was scarcely visible now; this horizontal blaze of gas-light killed it; and through the yellow glare passed the dusky phantasmagoria of a city's life—the cars and horses, the grimy crowds. Buchanan Street, it is true, was less noisy; and he walked quickly, glad to get out of that terrible din; and by and by, when he got away up to Port Dundas Road, where his lodging was, he found the world grown quite quiet again, and gloomy and dark, save for the solitary gas-lamps and the faint dull crimson glow sent across from the southern skies.

He went up the stone stair, was admitted to the house, and shown into the apartment that his brother had secured for him. It had formerly been used as a sitting-room, with a bedroom attached; but now these were separated, and a bed was placed at one end of the little parlour, which was plainly and not untidily furnished. When his landlady left he proceeded to unpack his things, getting out first his books, which he placed on the mantel-shelf to be ready for use in the morning; then he made some further disposition of his belongings; and then—then somehow he fell away

from this industrious mood, and became more and more absent, and at last went idly to the window, and stood looking out there. There was not much to be seen—a few lights about the Caledonian Railway Station, some dusky sheds, and that faint red glow in the sky.

But—Inver-Mudal? Well, if only he had reflected, Inver-Mudal must at this moment have been just about as dark as was this railway station and the neighbourhood surrounding it—unless, indeed, it happened to be a clear starlit night away up there in the north, with the heavens shining beautiful and benignant over Clebrig, and the loch, and the little hamlet among the trees. However, that was not the Inver-Mudal he was thinking of; it was the Inver-Mudal of a clear spring day, with sweet winds blowing across the moors, and the sunlight yellow on Clebrig's slopes, and Loch Naver's waters all a rippling and dazzling blue. And Mr. Murray standing at the door of the inn, and smoking his pipe, and joking with any one that passed; the saucy Nelly casting glances among the lads; Harry with dark suspicions of rats wherever he could find a hole in the wall of the barn; Maggie, under instruction of Duncan the ploughman, driving the two horses hauling a harrow over the rough red land; everywhere the birds singing; the young corn showing green; and then—just as the chance might be—Meenie coming along the road, her golden-brown hair blown by the wind, her eyes about as blue as Loch Naver's shining waters, and herself calling, with laughter and scolding, to Maggie to desist from that tomboy work. And where was it all gone now? He seemed to have shut his eyes upon that beautiful clear, joyous world; and to have plunged into a hideous and ghastly dream. The roar and yellow glare—the black

houses—the lurid crimson in the sky—the terrible loneliness and silence of this very room—well, he could not quite understand it yet. But perhaps it would not always seem so bewildering; perhaps one might grow accustomed in time?—and teach one's self to forget? And then again he had resolved that he would not read over any more the verses he had written in the olden days about Meenie, and the hills and the streams and the straths that knew her and loved her—for these idle rhymes made him dream dreams; that is to say, he had almost resolved—he had very nearly resolved—that he would not read over any more the verses he had written about Meenie.

CHAPTER X.

GRAY DAYS.

But, after all, that first plunge into city-life had had something of the excitement of novelty; it was the settling down thereafter to the dull monotonous round of labour, in this lonely lodging, with the melancholy gray world of mist surrounding him and shutting him in, that was to test the strength of his resolve. The first day was not so bad; for now and again he would relieve the slow tedium of the hours by doing a little carpentering about the room; and the sharp sound of hammer and nail served to break in upon that hushed, slumberous murmur of the great city without that seemed a mournful, distant, oppressive thing. But the next day of this solitary life (for it was not until the end of the week he was to see Mr. Weems) was dreadful. The dull, silent gray hours would not go by. Wrestling with Ewart's *Agricultural Assistant*, or Balfour's *Elements of Botany*, or with distressing problems in land-surveying or timber-measuring, he would think the time had passed; and then, going to the window for a moment's relief to eye and brain, he would see by the clock of the railway station that barely half an hour had elapsed since last he had looked at the obdurate hands. How he envied the porters, the cab-drivers, the men who were loading and unloading

the waggons; they seemed all so busy and contented; they were getting through with their work; they had something to show for their labour; they had companions to talk to and joke with; sometimes he thought he could hear them laughing. And ah, how much more he envied the traveller who drove up and got leisurely out of the cab, and had his luggage carried into the station, himself following and disappearing from view! Whither was he going, then, away from this great, melancholy city, with its slow hours, and wan skies, and dull, continuous, stupefying murmur? Whither, indeed!—away by the silver links of Forth, perhaps, with the castled rock of Stirling rising into the windy blue and white; away by the wooded banks of Allan Water and the bonny Braes of Doune; by Strathyre, and Glenogle, and Glenorchy; and past the towering peaks of Ben Cruachan, and out to the far-glancing waters of the western seas. Indeed it is a sore pity that Miss Carry Hodson, in a fit of temper, had crushed together and thrust into the bottom of the boat the newspaper containing an estimate of Ronald's little Highland poem; if only she had handed it on to him, he would have learned that the sentiment of nostalgia is too slender and fallacious a thing for any sensible person to bother his head about; and, instead of wasting his time in gazing at the front of a railway station, he would have gone resolutely back to Strachan's *Agricultural Tables* and the measuring and mapping of surface areas.

On the third day he grew desperate.

'In God's name let us see if there's not a bit of blue sky anywhere!' he said to himself; and he flung his books aside, and put on his Glengarry cap, and took a stick in his hand, and went out.

Alas! that there were no light pattering steps following him down the stone stair; the faithful Harry had had to be left behind, under charge of Mr. Murray of the inn. And indeed Ronald found it so strange to be going out without some companion of the kind that when he passed into the wide, dull thoroughfare, he looked up and down everywhere to see if he could not find some homeless wandering cur that he could induce to go with him. But there was no sign of dog-life visible; for the matter of that there was little sign of any other kind of life; there was nothing before him but the wide, empty, dull-hued street, apparently terminating in a great wilderness of india-rubber works and oil-works and the like, all of them busily engaged in pouring volumes of smoke through tall chimneys into the already sufficiently murky sky.

But when he got farther north, he found that there were lanes and alleys permeating this mass of public works; and eventually he reached a canal, and crossed that, deeming that if he kept straight on he must reach the open country somewhere. As yet he could make out no distance; blocks of melancholy soot-begrimed houses, timber-yards, and blank stone walls shut in the view on every hand; moreover there was a brisk north wind blowing that was sharply pungent with chemical fumes and also gritty with dust; so that he pushed on quickly, anxious to get some clean air into his lungs, and anxious, if that were possible, to get a glimpse of green fields and blue skies. For, of course, he could not always be at his books; and this, as he judged, must be the nearest way out into the country; and he could not do better than gain some knowledge of his surroundings, and perchance discover some more or less secluded sylvan retreat, where, in idle time, he might pass an hour or so

with his pencil and his verses and his memories of the moors and hills.

But the farther out he got the more desolate and desolating became the scene around him. Here was neither town nor country; or rather, both were there; and both were dead. He came upon a bit of hawthorn-hedge; the stems were coal-black, the leaves begrimed out of all semblance to natural foliage. There were long straight roads, sometimes fronted by a stone wall and sometimes by a block of buildings—dwelling-houses, apparently, but of the most squalid and dingy description; the windows opaque with dirt; the 'closes' foul; the pavements in front unspeakable. But the most curious thing was the lifeless aspect of this dreary neighbourhood. Where were the people? Here or there two or three ragged children would be playing in the gutter; or perhaps, in a dismal little shop, an old woman might be seen, with some half-withered apples and potatoes on the counter. But where were the people who at one time or other must have inhabited these great, gaunt, gloomy tenements? He came to a dreadful place called Saracen Cross—a very picture of desolation and misery; the tall blue-black buildings showing hardly any sign of life in their upper flats; the shops below being for the most part tenantless, the windows rudely boarded over. It seemed as if some blight had fallen over the land, first obliterating the fields, and then laying its withering hand on the houses that had been built on them. And yet these melancholy-looking buildings were not wholly uninhabited; here or there a face was visible—but always of women or children; and perhaps the men-folk were away at work somewhere in a factory. Anyhow, under this dull gray sky, with a dull gray mist in the air,

and with a strange silence everywhere around, the place seemed a City of the Dead; he could not understand how human beings could live in it at all.

At last, however, he came to some open spaces that still bore some half-decipherable marks of the country, and his spirits rose a little. He even tried to sing 'O say, will you marry me, Nelly Munro?'—to force himself into a kind of liveliness, as it were, and to prove to himself that things were not quite so bad after all. But the words stuck in his throat. His voice sounded strangely in this silent and sickly solitude. And at last he stood stock-still, to have a look round about him, and to make out what kind of a place this was that he had entered into.

Well, it was a very strange kind of place. It seemed to have been forgotten by somebody, when all the other land near was being ploughed through by railway-lines and heaped up into embankments. Undoubtedly there were traces of the country still remaining—and even of agriculture; here and there a line of trees, stunted and nipped by the poisonous air; a straggling hedge or two, withered and black; a patch of corn, of a pallid and hopeless colour; and a meadow with cattle feeding in it. But the road that led through these bucolic solitudes was quite new and made of cinders; in the distance it seemed to lose itself in a network of railway embankments; while the background of this strange simulacrum of a landscape—so far as that could be seen through the pall of mist and smoke—seemed to consist of further houses, ironworks, and tall chimney-stacks. Anything more depressing and disconsolate he had never witnessed; nay, he had had no idea that any such God-forsaken neighbourhood existed anywhere in the world; and he thought he would much rather be back at his

books than wandering through this dead and spectral land. Moreover it was beginning to rain—a thin, pertinacious drizzle that seemed to hang in the thick and clammy air; and so he struck away to the right, in the direction of some houses, guessing that there he would find some way of getting back to the city other than that ghastly one he had come by.

By the time he had reached these houses—a suburb or village this seemed to be that led in a straggling fashion up to the crest of a small hill—it was raining heavily. Now ordinarily a gamekeeper in the Highlands is not only indifferent to rain, but apparently incapable of perceiving the existence of it. When was wet weather at Inver-Mudal ever known to interfere with the pursuits or occupations of anybody? Why, the lads there would as soon have thought of taking shelter from the rain as a terrier would. But it is one thing to be walking over wet heather in knicker-bocker-stockings and shoes, the water quite clean, and the exercise keeping legs and feet warm enough, and it is entirely another thing to be walking through mud made of black cinders, with clammy trousers flapping coldly round one's ankles. Nay, so miserable was all this business that he took refuge in an entry leading into one of those 'lands' of houses; and there he stood, in the cold stone passage, with a chill wind blowing through it, looking out on the swimming pavements, and the black and muddy road, and the dull stone walls, and the mournful skies.

At length, the rain moderating somewhat, he issued out from this shelter, and set forth for the town. A tramway-car passed him, but he had no mind to be jammed in amongst a lot of elderly women, all damp and with dripping umbrellas. Nay, he was trying to convince himself that the very discomfort of this dreary march homeward—

through mud and drizzle and fog—was a wholesome thing. After that glimpse of the kind of country that lay outside the town—in this direction at least—there would be less temptation for him to throw down his books and go off for idle strolls. He assured himself that he ought to be glad that he found no verdant meadows and purling brooks; that, on the contrary, the aspect of this suburban territory was sufficiently appalling to drive him back to his lodgings. All the same, when he did arrive there, he was somewhat disheartened and depressed; and he went up the stone staircase slowly; and when he entered that solitary, dull little room, and sate down, he felt limp and damp and tired—tired, after a few miles' walk! And then he took to his books again, with his mouth set hard.

Late that night he was sitting as usual alone, and rather absently turning over his papers; and already it had come to this that now, when he chanced to read any of these writings of his of former days, they seemed to have been written by some one else. Who was this man, then, that seemed to go through the world with a laugh and a song, as it were; rating this one, praising that; having it all his own way; and with never a thought of the morrow? But there was one piece in particular that struck home. It was a description of the little terrier; he had pencilled it on the back of an envelope one warm summer day when he was lying at full length on the heather, with Harry not half a dozen yards off, his nose between his paws. Harry did not know that his picture was being taken.

Auld, gray, and grizzled; yellow een:
A nose as brown's a berry;
A wit as sharp as ony preen—
That's my wee chieftain Harry.

Lord sakes!—the courage of the man!
The biggest barn-yard ratten,
He'll snip him by the neck, o'er-han',
As he the deil had gatten.

And when his master's work on hand,
There's none maun come anear him:
The biggest Duke in all Scotland,
My Harry's teeth would fear him.

But ordinar' wise like fowl or freen,
He's harmless as a kitten;
As soon he'd think o' worryin'
A hennie when she's sittin'.

But Harry, lad, ye're growin' auld;
Your days are gettin' fewer;
And maybe Heaven has made a fauld
For such wee things as you are.

And what strange kintra will that be?
And will they fill your coggies?
And whatna strange folk there will see
There's water for the doggies?

Ae thing I brawly ken; it's this—
Ye may hae work or play there;
But if your master once ye miss,
I'm bound ye winna stay there.

It was the last verse that struck home. It was through no failure of devotion on the part of the faithful Harry that he was now at Inver-Mudal; it was his master that had played him false, and severed the old companionship. And he kept thinking about the little terrier; and wondering whether he missed his master as much as his master missed him; and wondering whether Meenie had ever a word for him as she went by—for she and Harry had always been great friends. Nay, perhaps Meenie might not take it ill if Maggie wrote to her for news of the little dog; and then Meenie would answer; and might not her letter take a wider scope, and say something about the people there, and

about herself? Surely she would do that; and some fine morning the answer—in Meenie's handwriting—would be delivered in Abbotsford Place; and he knew that Maggie would not be long in apprising him of the same. Perhaps, indeed, he might himself become possessed of that precious missive; and bring it away with him; and from time to time have a glance at this or that sentence of it—in Meenie's own actual handwriting—when the long dull work of the day was over, and his fancy free to fly away to the north again, to Strath-Terry and Clebrig and Loch Naver, and the neat small cottage with the red blinds in the windows. It seemed to him a long time now since he had left all of these; he felt as though Glasgow had engulfed him: while the day of his rescue—the day of the fulfilment of his ambitious designs—was now growing more and more distant and vague and uncertain, leaving him only the slow drudgery of these weary hours. But Meenie's letter would be a kind of talisman; to see her handwriting would be like hearing her speak; and surely this dull little lodging was quiet enough, so that in the hushed silence of the evening, he, reading those cheerful phrases, might persuade himself that it was Meenie's voice he was listening to, with the quiet, clear, soft laugh that so well he remembered.

And so these first days went by; and he hoped in time to get more accustomed to this melancholy life; and doggedly he stuck to the task he had set before him. As for the outcome of it all—well, that did not seem quite so facile nor so fine a thing as it had appeared before he came away from the north; but he left that for the future to decide; and in the meantime he was above all anxious not to perplex himself by the dreaming of idle dreams. He had come to Glasgow to work; not to build impossible castles in the air.

CHAPTER XI.

KATE.

And yet it was a desperately hard ordeal; for this man was by nature essentially joyous, and sociable, and fitted to be the king of all good company; and the whole of his life had been spent in the open, in brisk and active exercise; and sunlight and fresh air were to him as the very breath of his nostrils. But here he was, day after day, week after week, chained to these dismal tasks; in solitude; with the far white dream of ambition becoming more and more distant and obscured; and with a terrible consciousness ever growing upon him that in coming away from even the mere neighbourhood of Meenie, from the briefest companionship with her, he had sacrificed the one beautiful thing, the one precious possession, that his life had ever held for him or would hold. What though the impalpable barrier of Glengask and Orosay rose between him and her? He was no sentimental Claude Melnotte; he had common sense; he accepted facts. Of course Meenie would go away in due time. Of course she was destined for higher things. But what then? What of the meanwhile? Could anything happen to him quite so wonderful, or worth the striving for, as Meenie's smile to him as she met him in the road? What for the time being made the skies full of

brightness, and made the pulses of the blood flow gladly, and the day become charged with a kind of buoyancy of life? And as for these vague ambitions for the sake of which he had bartered away his freedom and sold himself into slavery—towards what did they tend? For whom? The excited atmosphere the Americans had brought with them had departed now: alas! this other atmosphere into which he had plunged was dull and sad enough, in all conscience; and the leaden days weighed down upon him; and the slow and solitary hours would not go by.

One evening he was coming in to the town by way of the Pollokshaws road; he had spent the afternoon hard at work with Mr. Weems, and was making home again to the silent little lodging in the north. He had now been a month and more in Glasgow; and had formed no kind of society or companionship whatever. Once or twice he had looked in at his brother's; but that was chiefly to see how the little Maggie was going on; his sister-in-law gave him no over-friendly welcome; and, indeed, the social atmosphere of the Reverend Andrew's house was far from being congenial to him. As for the letter of introduction that Meenie had given him to her married sister, of course he had not had the presumption to deliver that; he had accepted the letter, and thanked Meenie for it—for it was but another act of her always thoughtful kindness; but Mrs. Gemmill was the wife of a partner in a large warehouse; and they lived in Queen's Crescent; and altogether Ronald had no thought of calling on them—although to be sure he had heard that Mrs. Gemmill had been making sufficiently minute and even curious inquiries with regard to him of a member of his brother's congregation whom she happened to know. No; he lived his life alone;

wrestling with the weariness of it as best he might; and not quite knowing, perhaps, how deeply it was eating into his heart.

Well, he was walking absently home on this dull gray evening, watching the lamp-lighter adding point after point to the long string of golden stars, when there went by a smartly appointed dog-cart. He did not particularly remark the occupants of the vehicle, though he knew they were two women, and that one of them was driving; his glance fell rather on the well-groomed cob, and he thought the varnished oak dog-cart looked neat and business-like. The next second it was pulled up; there was a pause, during which time he was of course drawing nearer; and then a woman's voice called to him—

'Bless me, is that you, Ronald?'

He looked up in amazement. And who was this, then, who had turned her head round and was now regarding him with her laughing, handsome, bold black eyes? She was a woman apparently of five-and-thirty or so, but exceedingly well preserved and comely; of pleasant features and fresh complexion; and of rather a manly build and carriage—an appearance that was not lessened by her wearing a narrow-brimmed little billycock hat. And then, even in this gathering dusk, he recognised her; and unconsciously he repeated her own words—

'Bless me, is that you, Mrs.—Mrs.—Menzies—' for in truth he had almost forgotten her name.

'Mrs. This or Mrs. That!' the other cried. 'I thought my name was Kate—it used to be anyway. Well, I declare! Come, give us a shake of your hand—auntie, this is my cousin Ronald!—and who would hae thought of meeting you in Glasgow, now!'

'I have been here a month and more,' Ronald said, taking the proffered hand.

'And never to look near me once—there's friendliness! Eh, and what a man you've grown to—ye were just a bit laddie when I saw ye last—but aye after the lasses, though—oh aye—bless me, what changes there hae been since then!'

'Well, Katie, it's not you that have changed much anyway,' said he, for he was making out again the old familiar girlish expression in the firmer features of the mature woman.

'And what's brought ye to Glasgow?' said she—but then she corrected herself: 'No, no; I'll have no long story wi' you standing on the pavement like that. Jump up behind, Ronald, lad, and come home wi' us, and we'll have a crack thegither——'

'Katie, dear,' said her companion, who was a little, white-faced, cringing and fawning old woman, 'let me get down and get up behind. Your cousin must sit beside ye——'

But already Ronald had swung himself on to the after-seat of the vehicle; and Mrs. Menzies had touched the cob with her whip; and soon they were rattling away into the town.

'I suppose ye heard that my man was dead?' said she presently, and partly turning round.

'I think I did,' he answered rather vaguely.

'He was a good man to me, like Auld Robin Gray,' said this strapping widow, who certainly had a very matter-of-fact way in talking about her deceased husband. 'But he was never the best of managers, poor man. I've been doing better ever since. We've a better business, and not a penny of mortgage left on the tavern.'

'Weel ye may say that, Katie,' whined the old woman. 'There never was such a manager as you—never. Ay, and the splendid furniture—it was never thought o' in his time—bless 'm! A good man he was, and a kind man; but no the manager you are, Katie; there's no such another tavern in a' Glesca.'

Now although the cousinship with Ronald claimed by Mrs. Menzies did not exist in actual fact,—there was some kind of remote relationship, however,—still, it must be confessed that it was very ungrateful and inconstant of him to have let the fate and fortunes of the pretty Kate Burnside (as she was in former days) so entirely vanish from his mind and memory. Kate Burnside was the daughter of a small farmer in the Lammermuir district; and the Strangs and Burnsides were neighbours as well as remotely related by blood. But that was not the only reason why Ronald ought to have remembered a little more about the stalwart, black-eyed, fresh-cheeked country wench who, though she was some seven or eight years or more his senior, he had boldly chosen for his sweetheart in his juvenile days. Nay, had she not been the first inspirer of his muse; and had he not sung this ox-eyed goddess in many a laboured verse, carefully constructed after the manner of Tannahill or Motherwell or Allan Cunningham? The 'lass of Lammer Law' he called her in these artless strains; and Kate was far from resenting this frank devotion; nay, she even treasured up the verses in which her radiant beauties were enumerated; for why should not a comely East Lothian wench take pleasure in being told that her cheeks outshone the rose, and that the 'darts o' her bonnie black een' had slain their thousands, and that her faithful lover would come to see her, ay, though the Himalayas barred his way? But

then, alas !—as happens in the world—the faithful lover was sent off into far neighbourhoods to learn the art and mystery of training pointers and setters ; and Kate's father died, and the family dispersed from the farm ; Kate went into service in Glasgow, and there she managed to capture the affections of an obese and elderly publican whom—she being a prudent and sensible kind of a creature—she forthwith married ; by and by, through partaking too freely of his own wares, he considerately died, leaving her in sole possession of the tavern (he had called it a public-house, but she soon changed all that, and the place too, when she was established as its mistress) ; and now she was a handsome, buxom, firm-nerved woman, who could and did look well after her own affairs ; who had a flourishing business, a comfortable bank account, and a sufficiency of friends of her own way of thinking ; and whose raven-black hair did not as yet show a single streak of gray. It was all this latter part of Kate Burnside's—or rather, Mrs. Menzies's—career of which Ronald was so shamefully ignorant ; but she speedily gave him enough information about herself as they drove through the gas-lit streets, for she was a voluble, high-spirited woman, who could make herself heard when she chose.

'Ay,' said she, at length, 'and where have ye left the goodwife, Ronald ?'

'What goodwife ?' said he.

'Ye dinna tell me that you're no married yet ?'

'Not that I know of,' said he.

'What have ye been about, man ? Ye were aye daft about the lasses ; and ye no married yet ? What have ye been about, man, to let them a' escape ye ?'

'Some folk have other things to think of,' said he evasively.

'Dinna tell me,' she retorted. 'I ken weel what's uppermost in the mind o' a handsome lad like you. Weel, if ye're no married, ye're the next door to it, I'll be bound. What's she like?'

'I'll tell ye when I find her,' said he drily.

'Ye're a dark one; but I'll find ye out, my man.'

She could not continue the conversation, for they were about to cross the bridge over the Clyde, and the congested traffic made her careful. And then again Jamaica Street was crowded and difficult to steer through; but presently she left that for a quieter thoroughfare leading off to the right; and in a few moments she had pulled up in front of a large tavern, close by a spacious archway.

'Auntie, gang you and fetch Alec to take the cob round, will ye?' said she; and then Ronald, surmising that she had now reached home, leapt to the ground, and went to the horse's head. Presently the groom appeared, and Kate Menzies descended from her chariot.

Now in Glasgow, for an establishment of this kind to be popular, it must have a side entrance—the more the merrier, indeed—by which people can get into the tavern without being seen; but besides this it soon appeared that Mrs. Menzies had a private right of way of her own. She bade Ronald follow her; she went through the archway; produced a key and opened a door; and then, passing along a short lobby, he found himself in what might be regarded as the back parlour of the public-house, but was in reality a private room reserved by Mrs. Menzies for herself and her intimate friends. And a very brilliant little apartment it was; handsomely furnished and shining with stained wood, plate glass, and velvet; the gas-jets all aglow

in the clear globes; the table in the middle laid with a white cloth for supper, all sparkling with crystal and polished electro-plate. Moreover (for business is business) this luxurious little den commanded at will complete views of the front premises; and there was also a door leading thither; but the door was shut, and the red blinds were drawn over the two windows, so that the room looked quite like one in a private dwelling.

'And now, my good woman,' said Mrs. Menzies, as she threw her hat and cloak and dog-skin gloves into a corner, 'just you mak' them hurry up wi' supper; for we're just home in time; and we'll want another place at the table. And tell Jeannie there's a great friend o' mine come in, if she can get anything special—Lord's sake, Ronald, if I had kent I was going to fall in with you I would have looked after it mysel'.'

'Ye need not bother about me,' said he, 'for supper is not much in my way—not since I came to the town. Without the country air, I think one would as lief not sit down to a table at all.'

'Oh, I can cure ye o' that complaint,' she said confidently; and she rang the bell.

Instantly the door was opened, and he caught a glimpse of a vast palatial-looking place, with more stained wood and plate glass and velvet, and with several smartly-dressed young ladies standing or moving behind the long mahogany counters; moreover, one of these—a tall and serious-eyed maiden—now stood at the partly opened door.

'Gin and bitters, Mary,' said Mrs. Menzies briskly—she was at this moment standing in front of one of the mirrors, complacently smoothing her hair with her hands, and setting to rights her mannish little necktie.

The serious-eyed handmaiden presently reappeared, bringing a small salver, on which was a glass filled with some kind of a fluid, which she presented to him.

'What's this?' said he, appealing to his hostess.

'Drink it and find out,' said she; 'it'll make ye jump wi' hunger, as the Hielanman said.'

He did as he was bid; and loudly she laughed at the wry face that he made.

'What's the matter?'

'It's a devil of a kind of thing, that,' said he; for it was a first experience.

'Ay, but wait till ye find how hungry it will make ye,' she answered; and then she returned from the mirror. 'And I'm sure ye'll no mind my hair being a wee thing camstrairy, Ronald; there's no need for ceremony between auld freens, as the saying is——'

'But, look here, Katie, my lass,' said he—for perhaps he was a little emboldened by that fiery fluid, 'I'm thinking that maybe I'm making myself just a little too much at home. Now, some other time, when ye've no company, I'll come in and see ye——'

But she cut him short at once, and with some pride.

'Indeed, I'll tell ye this, that the day that Ronald Strang comes into my house—and into my own house too—that's no the day that he's gaun out o't without eating and drinking. Ma certes, no! And as for company, why there's none but auld mother Paterson—I ca' her auntie; but she's no more my auntie than you are—ye see, my man, Ronald, a poor, unprotected helpless widow woman maun look after appearances—for the world's unco given to leein', as Shakespeare says. There, Ronald, that's another thing,' she added suddenly—'ye'll take me to the theatre!—my word, we'll have a box!'

But these gay visions were interrupted by the reappearance of Mrs. Paterson, who was followed by a maidservant bearing a dish on which was a large sole, smoking hot. Indeed, it soon became apparent that this was to be a very elaborate banquet, such as Ronald was not at all familiar with; and all the care and flattering attention his hostess could pay him she paid him, laughing and joking with him, and insisting on his having the very best of everything, and eager to hand things to him—even if she rather ostentatiously displayed her abundant rings in doing so. And when mother Paterson said—

'What will ye drink, Katie dear? Some ale—or some porter?'

The other stormily answered—

'Get out, ye daft auld wife! Ale or porter the first day that my cousin Ronald comes into my own house? Champagne's the word, woman; and the best! What will ye have, Ronald—what brand do ye like?—Moett and Shandon?'

Ronald laughed.

'What do I know about such things?' said he. 'And besides, there's no reason for such extravagance. There's been no stag killed the day.'

'There's been no stag killed the day,' she retorted, 'but Ronald Strang's come into my house, and he'll have the best that's in it, or my name's no Kate Burnside—or Kate Menzies, I should say, God forgie me! Ring the bell, auntie.'

This time the grave-eyed barmaid appeared.

'A bottle of Moett and Shandon, Mary.'

'A pint bottle, m'm?'

'A pint bottle—ye stupid idiot?' she said (but quite good-naturedly). 'A quart bottle, of course!'

And then when the bottle was brought and the glasses filled, she said—

'Here's your health, Ronald; and right glad am I to see you looking so weel—ye were aye a bonnie laddie, and ye've kept the promise o't—ay, indeed, the whole o' you Strangs were a handsome family—except your brother Andrew, maybe——'

'Do ye ever see Andrew?' Ronald said; for a modest man does not like to have his looks discussed, even in the most flattering way.

Then loudly laughed Kate Menzies.

'Me? Me gang and see the Reverend Andrew Strang? No fears! He's no one o' my kind. He'd drive me out o' the house wi' bell, book, and candle. I hae my ain friends, thank ye—and I'm going to number you amongst them so long as ye stop in this town. Auntie, pass the bottle to Ronald!'

And so the banquet proceeded—a roast fowl and bacon, an apple-tart, cheese and biscuits and what not following in due succession; and all the time she was learning more and more of the life that Ronald had led since he had left the Lothians, and freely she gave him of her confidences in return. On one point she was curiously inquisitive, and that was as to whether he had not been in some entanglement with one or other of the Highland lasses up there in Sutherlandshire; and there was a considerable amount of joking on that subject, which Ronald bore good-naturedly enough; finding it on the whole the easier way to let her surmises have free course.

'But ye're a dark one!' she said at length. 'And ye would hae me believe that a strapping fellow like you hasna had the lasses rinnin' after him? I'm no sae daft.'

'I'll tell ye what it is, Katie,' he retorted, 'the lasses in the Highlands have their work to look after; they dinna live a' in clover, like the Glasgow dames.'

'Dinna tell me—dinna tell me,' she said.

And now, as supper was over and the table cleared, she went to a small mahogany cabinet and opened it.

'I keep some cigars here for my particular friends,' said Mrs. Menzies, 'but I'm sure I dinna ken which is the best. Come and pick for yourself, Ronald lad; if you're no certain the best plan is to take the biggest.'

'This is surely living on the fat of the land, Katie,' he protested.

'And what for no?' said she boldly. 'Let them enjoy themselves that's earned the right to it.'

'But that's not me,' he said.

'Well, it's me,' she answered. 'And when my cousin Ronald comes into my house, it's the best that's in it that's at his service—and no great wonder either!'

Well, her hospitality was certainly a little stormy; but the handsome widow meant kindly and well; and it is scarcely to be marvelled at if—under the soothing influences of the fragrant tobacco—he was rather inclined to substitute for this brisk and business-like Kate Menzies of these present days the gentler figure of the Kate Burnside of earlier years, more especially as she had taken to talking of those times, and of all the escapades the young lads and lasses used to enjoy on Hallowe'en night or during the first-footing at Hogmanay.

'And now I mind me, Ronald,' she said, 'ye used to be a fine singer when ye were a lad. Do ye keep it up still?'

'I sometimes try,' he answered. 'But there's no been

much occasion since I came to this town. It's a lonely kind o' place, for a' the number o' folk in it.'

'Well, now ye're among friends, give us something!'

'Oh, that I will, if ye like,' said he readily; and he laid aside his cigar.

And then he sang—moderating his voice somewhat, so that he should not be heard in the front premises—a verse or two of an old favourite—

> '*The sun rase sae rosy, the gray hills adorning,*
> *Light sprang the laverock, and mounted sae high,*'

and if his voice was quiet, still the clear, penetrating quality of it was there; and when he had finished Kate Menzies said to him—after a second of irresolution—

'Ye couldna sing like that when ye were a lad, Ronald. It's maist like to gar a body greet.'

But he would not sing any more that night; he guessed that she must have her business affairs to attend to; and he was resolved upon going, in spite of all her importunacy. However, as a condition, she got him to promise to come and see her on the following evening. It was Saturday night; several of her friends were in the habit of dropping in on that night; finally, she pressed her entreaty so that he could not well refuse; and, having promised, he left.

And no doubt as he went home through the great, noisy, lonely city, he felt warmed and cheered by this measure of human companionship that had befallen him. As for Kate Menzies, it would have been a poor return for her excessive kindness if he had stopped to ask himself whether her robust *camaraderie* did not annoy him a little. He had had plenty of opportunities of becoming acquainted with the manners and speech and ways of refined and

educated women; indeed, there are few gamekeepers in the Highlands who have not at one time or another enjoyed that privilege. Noble and gracious ladies who, in the south, would as soon think of talking to a door-mat as of entering into any kind of general conversation with their butler or coachman, will fall quite naturally into the habit—when they are living away in the seclusion of a Highland glen with the shooting-party at the lodge—of stopping to have a chat with Duncan or Hector the gamekeeper when they chance to meet him coming along the road with his dogs; and, what is more, they find him worth the talking to. Then, again, had not Ronald been an almost daily spectator of Miss Douglas's sweet and winning manners—and that continued through years; and had not the young American lady, during the briefer period she was in the north, made quite a companion of him in her frank and brave fashion? He had almost to confess to himself that there was just a little too much of Mrs. Menzies's tempestuous good nature; and then again he refused to confess anything of the kind; and quarrelled with himself for being so ungrateful. Why, the first bit of real, heartfelt friendliness that had been shown him since he came to this great city; and he was to examine it; and be doubtful; and wish that the keeper of a tavern should be a little more refined!

'Ronald lad,' he was saying to himself when he reached his lodging in the dusky Port Dundas Road, 'it's over-fed stomachs that wax proud. You'll be better minded if you keep to your books and plainer living.'

CHAPTER XII.

A SOCIAL EVENING.

LOOKING forward to this further festivity he worked hard at his studies all day, and it was not until nearly nine o'clock in the evening that he went away down through the roaring streets to keep his engagement with Kate Menzies. And very snug and comfortable indeed did the little parlour look, with its clear glass globes and warmly-cushioned seats and brilliant mirrors and polished wood. Kate herself (who was quite resplendent in purple velvet and silver necklace and bangles) was reading a sporting newspaper; old mother Paterson was sewing; there were cigar-boxes on the table.

'And what d'ye mean,' cried the handsome widow gaily, when he made his appearance, 'by coming at this hour? Did not I tell ye we would expect ye to supper?'

'Would ye have me eat you out o' house and home, woman?' he said. 'Besides, I had some work to get through.'

'Well, sit down and make yerself happy; better late than never; there's the cigars——'

'I would as lief smoke a pipe, Katie, if ye don't object—only that I'm shamed to smoke in a fine place like this——'

'What is't for, man? Do ye think I got it up for an

exhibition—to be put in a glass case! And what'll ye drink now, Ronald—some Moett and Shandon?'

'Indeed no,' said he. 'If I may light my pipe I want nothing else.'

'But I canna bear an empty table,' said she. 'Here, auntie, get your flounces and falderals out o' the road—bless us, woman, ye make the place look like a milliner's shop! And bring out the punch-bowl frae the chiffonnier—I want ye to see it, Ronald, for it was gien to my gudeman by an auld freend o' his in Ayr, that got it from the last of the lairds o' Garthlie. And if ane or twa o' them happen to come in to-night we'll try a brew—for there's naething so wholesome, after a', as the wine o' the country, and I can gie ye some o' the real stuff. Will ye no try a drop the noo?'

'No thank ye, no thank ye,' said he, for he had lit his pipe, and was well content.

'Well, well, we'll have one o' the lasses in to set the tumblers and the glasses, for I canna thole to see a bare table; and in the meantime, Ronald, you and me can hae a crack be oursels, and ye can tell me what ye mean to do when ye get your certificate——'

'If I get it, ye mean, lass.'

'No fears,' she said confidently; 'ye were aye one o' the clever ones; I'll warrant ye there's na skim-milk in your head where the brains should be. But I want to ken what ye're ettling at after you've got the certificate, and what's your plans, and the like; for I've been thinking about it; and if there was any kind o' a starting needed—the loan of a bit something in the way of a nest-egg, ye see—weel, I ken a place where ye might get that, and ye wouldna have to whistle long at the yett either.'

Now there was no mistaking the generosity of this offer, however darkly it might be veiled by Kate Menzies's figurative manner of speech; and it was with none the less gratitude that he answered her and explained that a head-forester traded with the capital of his employer, though, to be sure, he might on entering a new situation have to find sureties for him.

'Is it caution-money ye mean, Ronald?' she said frankly.

'Well, if a man had no one to speak for him—no one whose word they would take,' he said to her (though all this was guess-work on his part), 'they might ask him for security. There would be no payment of money, of course, unless he robbed his employer; and then the sureties would have to make that good as far as they had undertaken. But it's a long way off yet, Katie, and hardly worth speaking about. I daresay Lord Ailine would say a word for me.'

'And is that a'?' she said, with a laugh. 'Is that a' the money's wanted for—to guarantee the honesty o' one o' the Strangs o' Whittermains? Weel, I'm no a rich woman, Ronald—for my money's maistly sunk in the tavern—and doing weel enough there too—but if it's a surety ye want, for three hunder pounds, ay, or five hunder pounds, just you come to me, and the deil's in't if we canna manage it somehow.'

'I thank ye for the offer anyway; I'm sure you mean it,' said he.

'That lawyer o' mine,' she continued, 'is a dour chiel; he'll no let me do this; and he's grumbling at that; and a poor widow woman is supposed to hae nae soul o' her ain. I'm sure the fuss that he makes about that cob, and only fifty-five guineas, and come o' the best Clydesdale stock——'

'But it was no the expense, it was no the expense, Katie dear,' whined the old woman, 'it was the risk to your life frae sae high-mettled a beast. Just think o't, at your time o' life, wi' a grand business, and yoursel' the manager o' it, and wi' sae mony freends, think what it would be if ye broke your neck——'

'Broke your grandmother's fiddlestrings!' said she. 'The beast's as quiet's a lamb. But that auld man, Peter Gunn. I suppose he's a good lawyer—indeed, every one says that—but he's as pernickety as an auld woman; and he'd mak' ye think the world was made o' silk paper, and ye daurna stir a step for fear o' fa'in through. But you just give me the word, Ronald, when the security's wanted; and we'll see if auld Peter can hinder me frae doing what I ought to do for one o' my own kith and kin.'

They were thus talking when there came a knock at the outer door; then there was a clamour of voices in the little lobby; and presently there were ushered into the room three visitors, who were forthwith introduced to Ronald, with a few words of facetious playfulness from the widow. There was first a Mr. Jaap, a little old man with Jewish features, bald on the top of his head, but with long, flowing gray hair behind; a mild-looking old man, but with merry eyes nevertheless—and indeed all of them seemed to have been joking as they came in. Then there was a Mr. Laidlaw, a younger man, of middle height, and of a horsey type; stupid-looking, rather, but not ill-natured. The third was Captain M'Taggart, a large heavy man, with a vast, radiant, Bardolphian face, whose small, shrewd, twinkling blue eyes had the expression rather of a Clyde skipper given to rough jesting and steady rum-drinking (and he was all that) than of the high-souled, child-hearted sailor of romance.

'Sit ye down, sit ye down,' their hostess said gaily. 'Here, captain, is a job for ye; here's the punch-bowl that we only have on great days, ye ken; and your brew is famous—whether wi' old Jamaica or Long John. Set to work now—here's the sugar and the lemons ready for ye—for ye maun a' drink the health o' my cousin here that's come frae Sutherland.'

'Frae Sutherland, say ye, Mistress?' the big skipper said, as he reached over for the lemons. 'Ye should ca' him your kissin frae the Hielans then. Do ye ken that story, Laidlaw? D'ye ken that yin about the Hielan kissins, Jaap? Man, that's a gude yin! have ye no heard it? Have ye no heard it, Mistress?'

'Tell us what it is first, and we'll tell you afterwards,' said she saucily.

'Weel, then,' said he—and he desisted from his preparations for the punch-making, for he was famous along the Broomielaw as a story-teller, and liked to keep up his reputation, 'it was twa young lasses, twa cousins they were, frae the west side o' Skye—and if there's ony place mair Hielan than that, it's no me that ever heard o't—and they were ta'en into service in an inn up about the Gairloch or Loch Inver, or one o' they lochs. Both o' them were good-looking lasses, mind ye; but one o' them just unusual handsome. Well, then, there happened to come to the inn an English tourist—a most respectable old gentleman he was; and it was one o' they two lasses—and no the brawest o' them either—that had to wait on him; but he was a freendly auld man; and on the mornin' o' his gaun awa he had to ring for something or other, and when she brought it to him, he said to her, jist by way o' compliment, ye ken, "You are a very good-looking girl, do you

know, Flora?" And of course the lass was very well pleased; but she was a modest lassie too; and she said, 'Oh no, sir; but I hef heard them say my kissin was peautiful!" "Your what?" said he. "My kissin, sir—" "Get away, you bold hussy! Off with you at once, or I'll ring for your master—you brazen baggage!"—and to this very day, they tell me, the poor lass doesna ken what on earth it was that made the auld man into a madman; for what harm had she done in telling him that her cousin was better-looking than herself?'

This recondite joke was received with much laughter by the company; and even Ronald had to admit that the Clyde skipper's imitation of the Highland accent was very fairly well done. But joke-making is dull work with empty glasses; and so Captain M'Taggart set himself seriously to the business of brewing that bowl of punch, while Kate Menzies polished the silver ladle to an even higher extreme of brilliancy.

Now these three old cronies of the widow's had betrayed a little surprise on finding a stranger installed in their favourite howf; and perhaps they might have been inclined to resent the intrusion had not Kate Menzies very speedily intimated her views upon the subject in unmistakable language. Her 'cousin Ronald' was all her cry; it was Ronald this and Ronald that; and whatever Ronald said, that was enough, and decisive. For, of course, after a glass or so of punch, the newcomers had got to talking politics—or what they took to be politics; and Ronald, when he was invited to express his opinion, proved to be on the unpopular side; nor did he improve his position by talking with open scorn of a great public agitation then going on—indeed, he so far forgot himself as to define stump-oratory as only another form of foot-and-mouth disease. But at

least he had one strenuous backer, and neither Mr. Laidlaw nor Mr. Jaap nor the big skipper was anxious to quarrel with a controversialist who had such abundant stores of hospitality at her command. Moreover, Kate Menzies was in the habit of speaking her mind; was it not better, for the sake of peace and quietness, to yield a little? This cousin of hers from the Highlands could parade some book-learning it is true; and he had plenty of cut-and-dried theories that sounded plausible enough; and his apparent knowledge of the working of American institutions was sufficiently good for an argument—so long as one could not get at the real facts; but they knew, of course, that, with time to get at these facts and to furnish forth replies to his specious reasonings, they could easily prove their own case. In the meantime they would be magnanimous. For the sake of good fellowship—and to oblige a lady—they shifted the subject.

Or rather she did.

'I suppose you'll be going to the Harmony Club to-night?' she said.

'For a while, at least,' replied the captain. 'Mr. Jaap's new song is to be sung the nicht; and we maun get him an encore for't. Not that it needs *us;* "Caledonia's hills and dales" will be a' ower Glasgow before a fortnight's out; and it's young Tam Dalswinton that's to sing it. Tam'll do his best, no fear.'

'It's little ye think,' observed Mrs. Menzies, with a kind of superior air, 'that there's somebody not a hundred miles frae here that can sing better than a' your members and a' your professionals put thegither. The Harmony Club! If the Harmony Club heard *him*, they might tak tent and learn a lesson.'

'Ay, and wha's he when he's at hame, Mistress?' Captain M'Taggart said.

'He's not fifty miles away frae here anyway,' she said. 'And if I was to tell ye that he's sitting not three yards away frae ye at this meenit?'

'Katie, woman, are ye daft?' Ronald said, and he laughed, but his forehead grew red all the same.

'No, I'm no,' she answered confidently. 'I ken what I'm saying as weel as most folk. Oh, I've heard some o' the best o' them—no at the Harmony Club, for they're too high and mighty to let women bodies in—but at the City Hall concerts and in the theatres; and I've got a good enough ear, too; I ken what's what; and I ken if my cousin Ronald were to stand up at the Saturday Evening Concerts, and sing the song he sung in this very room last night, I tell ye he would take the shine out o' some o' them!'

'He micht gie us a screed now,' Mr. Laidlaw suggested—his somewhat lack-lustre eyes going from his hostess to Ronald.

'Faith, no!' Ronald said, laughing, 'there's been ower great a flourish beforehand. The fact is, Mrs. Menzies here——'

'I thought I telled ye my name was Kate?' she said sharply.

'Kate, Cat, or Kitten, then, as ye like, woman, what I mean to say is that ower long a grace makes the porridge cold. Some other time—some other time, lass.'

'Ay, and look here, Mr. Jaap,' continued the widow, who was determined that her cousin's superior qualifications should not be hidden, 'ye are aye complaining that ye canna get anything but trash to set your tunes to. Well, here's my cousin; I dinna ken if he still keeps at the trade,

but as a laddie he could just write ye anything ye liked right aff the reel, and as good as Burns, or better. There's your chance now. Everybody says your music's jist splendid—and the choruses taken up in a meenit—but you just ask Ronald there to gie ye something worth while making a song o'.'

Now not only did the old man express his curiosity to see some of Ronald's work in this way, and also the gratification it would give him to set one of his songs to music, but Ronald was likewise well pleased with the proposal. His own efforts in adapting tunes to his verses he knew were very amateurish; and would it not be a new sensation—a little pride commingled with the satisfaction perhaps—to have one of his songs presented with an original air all to itself, and perhaps put to the test of being sung before some more or less skilled audience? He knew he had dozens to choose from; some of them patriotic, others convivial, others humorous in a kind of way: from any of these the musician was welcome to select as he liked. The love songs about Meenie were a class apart.

And now that they had got away from the thrashed-out straw of politics to more congenial themes, these three curiously assorted boon-companions proved to be extremely pleasant and good-natured fellows; and when, at length, they said it was time for them to be off to the musical club, they cordially invited Ronald to accompany them. He was nothing loth, for he was curious to see the place; and if Mrs. Menzies grumbled a little at being left alone she consoled herself by hinting that her *protégé* could teach them a lesson if he chose to do so.

'When ye've listened for a while to their squalling, Ronald, my man, jist you get up and show them how an East Lothian lad can do the trick.'

'What's that, Mistress? I thought ye said your cousin was frae the Hielans,' the skipper broke in.

'Frae the Hielans? Frae East Lothian, I tell ye; where I come frae mysel'; and where ye'll find the brawest lads and lasses in the breadth o' Scotland,' she added saucily.

'And they dinna stay a' at hame either,' remarked the big skipper, with much gallantry, as the visitors prepared to leave.

They went away through the noisy, crowded, glaring streets, and at length entered a spacious dark courtyard, at the head of which was a small and narrow entrance. The skipper led the way; but as they passed up the staircase they became aware of a noise of music overhead; and when they reached the landing, they had to pause there, so as not to interrupt the proceedings within. It was abundantly clear what these were. A man's voice was singing 'Green grow the rashes, O' to a smart and lively accompaniment on the piano; while at the end of each verse joined in a sufficiently enthusiastic chorus:

> '*Green grow the rashes, O,*
> *Green grow the rashes, O,*
> *The sweetest hours that e'er I spent,*
> *Were spent among the lasses, O.*'

and that was repeated:

> '*Green grow the rashes, O,*
> *Green grow the rashes, O,*
> *The sweetest hours that e'er I spen',*
> *Were spent among the lasses, O.*'

Then there was silence. The skipper now opened the door; and, as they entered, Ronald found himself near the head of a long and loftily-ceilinged apartment, the atmosphere of which was of a pale blue cast, through the presence

of much tobacco smoke. All down this long room were twin rows of small tables, at which little groups of friends or acquaintances sate—respectable looking men they seemed, many of them young fellows, more of them of middle age, and nearly all of them furnished with drinks and pipes or cigars. At the head of the room was a platform, not raised more than a foot from the floor, with a piano at one end of it; and in front of the platform was a special semicircular table, presided over by a bland rubicund gentleman, to whom Ronald was forthwith introduced. Indeed, the newcomers were fortunate enough to find seats at this semicircular table; and when beverages were called for and pipes lit, they waited for the further continuance of the proceedings.

These were of an entirely simple and ingenuous character, and had no taint whatsoever of the ghastly make-believe of wit, the mean swagger, and facetious innuendo of the London music hall. Now a member of the Club, when loudly called upon by the general voice, would step up to the platform and sing some familiar Scotch ballad; and again one of the professional singers in attendance (they did not appear in swallow-tail and white tie, by the way, but in soberer attire) would 'oblige' with something more ambitious; but throughout there was a prevailing tendency towards compositions with a chorus; and the chorus grew more universal and more enthusiastic as the evening proceeded. Then occasionally between the performances there occurred a considerable interval, during which the members of the Club would make brief visits to the other tables; and in this way Ronald made the acquaintance of a good number of those moderately convivial souls. For, if there was a tolerable amount of treating and its corresponding challenges, there was no drunkenness apparent anywhere; there

was some loud talking; and Captain M'Taggart was unduly anxious that everybody should come and sit at the President's table; but the greatest hilarity did not exceed bounds. It was to be observed, however, that, as the evening drew on, it was the extremely sentimental songs that were the chief favourites—those that mourned the bygone days of boyhood and youth, or told of the premature decease of some beloved Annie or Mary.

Ronald was once or twice pressed to sing; but he good-naturedly refused.

'Some other time, if I may have the chance, I will try to screw up my courage,' he said. 'And by that time ye'll have forgotten what Mrs. Menzies said: the East Lothian folk are wonderful for praising their own kith and kin.'

As to letting old Mr. Jaap have a song or two to set to music, that was another and simpler matter; and he promised to hunt out one or two of them. In truth, it would not be difficult, as he himself perceived, to find something a little better than the 'Caledonia's hills and dales' which was sung that night, and which was of a very familiar pattern indeed. And Ronald looked forward with not a little natural satisfaction to the possibility of one of his songs being sung in that resounding hall; a poet must have his audience somewhere; and this, at least, was more extensive than a handful of farm lads and lasses collected together in the barn at Inver-Mudal.

At about half-past eleven the entire company broke up and dispersed; and Ronald, after thanking his three companions very heartily for their hospitality during the evening, set off for his lodgings in the north of the city. He was quite enlivened and inspirited by this unusual whirl of gaiety; it had come into his sombre and lonely life as a

startling surprise. The rattle of the piano—the resounding choruses—the eager talk of these boon-companions—all this was of an exciting nature; and as he walked away through the now darkened thoroughfares, he began to wonder whether he could not write some lilting verses in the old haphazard way. He had not even tried such a thing since he came to Glasgow; the measurement of surface areas and the classification of Dicotyledons did not lead him in that direction. But on such a gala-night as this, surely he might string some lines together—about Glasgow lads and lasses, and good-fellowship, and the delights of a roaring town? It would be an experiment, in any case.

Well, when he had got home and lit the gas, and sate down to the jingling task, it was not so difficult, after all. But there was an undernote running through these verses that he had not contemplated when he set out. When the first glow of getting them together was over, he looked down the page, and then he put it away; in no circumstances could this kind of song find its way into the Harmony Club; and yet he was not altogether disappointed that it was so.

O Glasgow lasses are fair enough,
And Glasgow lads are merry;
But I would be with my own dear maid,
A-wandering down Strath-Terry.

And she would be singing her morning song,
The song that the larks have taught her;
A song of the northern seas and hills,
And a song of Mudal-Water.

The bands go thundering through the streets,
The fifes and drums together;
Far rather I'd hear the grouse-cock crow
Among the purple heather;

And I would be on Ben Clebrig's brow,
To watch the red-deer stealing
In single file adown the glen
And past the summer sheiling.

O Glasgow lasses are fair enough,
And Glasgow lads are merry;
But ah, for the voice of my own dear maid,
A-singing adown Strath-Terry!

CHAPTER XIII.

INDUCEMENTS.

Ronald's friendship with the hospitable widow and his acquaintanceship with those three boon-companions of hers grew apace; and many a merry evening they all of them had together in the brilliant little parlour, Ronald singing his own or any other songs without stint, the big skipper telling elaborately facetious Highland stories, the widow bountiful with her cigars and her whisky-toddy. And yet he was ill, ill at ease. He would not admit to himself, of course, that he rather despised these new acquaintances—for were they not most generous and kind towards him?—nor yet that the loud hilarity he joined in was on his part at times a trifle forced. Indeed, he could not very well have defined the cause of this disquietude and restlessness and almost despair that was present to his consciousness even when the laugh was at its loudest and the glasses going round most merrily. But the truth was he had begun to lose heart in his work. The first glow of determination that had enabled him to withstand the depression of the dull days and the monotonous labour had subsided now. The brilliant future the Americans had painted for him did not seem so attractive. Meenie was away; perhaps never to be met with more; and the old

glad days that were filled with the light of her presence were all gone now and growing ever more and more distant. And in the solitude of the little room up there in the Port Dundas Road—with the gray atmosphere ever present at the windows, and the dull rumble of the carts and waggons without—he was now getting into a habit of pushing aside his books for a while, and letting his fancies go far afield; insomuch that his heart seemed to grow more and more sick within him, and more and more he grew to think that somehow life had gone all wrong with him.

There is in Glasgow a thoroughfare familiarly known as Balmanno Brae. It is in one of the poorer neighbourhoods of the town; and is in truth rather a squalid and uninteresting place; but it has the one striking peculiarity of being extraordinarily steep, having been built on the side of a considerable hill. Now one must have a powerful imagination to see in this long, abrupt, blue-gray thoroughfare—with its grimy pavements and house-fronts, and its gutters running with dirty water—any resemblance to the wide slopes of Ben Clebrig and the carolling rills that flow down to Loch Naver; but all the same Ronald had a curious fancy for mounting this long incline, and that at the hardest pace he could go. For sometimes, in that little room, he felt almost like a caged animal dying for a wider air, a more active work; and here at least was a height that enabled him to feel the power of his knees; while the mere upward progress was a kind of inspiriting thing, one always having a vague fancy that one is going to see farther in getting higher. Alas! there was but the one inevitable termination to these repeated climbings; and that not the wide panorama embracing Loch Loyal and Ben Hope and the far Kyle of Tongue, but a wretched little lane called

Rotten Row—a double line of gloomy houses, with here and there an older-fashioned cottage with a thatched roof, and with everywhere pervading the close atmosphere an odour of boiled herrings. And then again, looking back, there was no yellow and wide-shining Strath-Terry, with its knolls of purple heather and its devious rippling burns, but only the great, dark, grim, mysterious city, weltering in its smoke, and dully groaning, as it were, under the grinding burden of its monotonous toil.

As the Twelfth of August drew near he became more and more restless. He had written to Lord Ailine to say that, if he could be of any use, he would take a run up to Inver-Mudal for a week or so, just to see things started for the season; but Lord Ailine had considerately refused the offer, saying that everything seemed going on well enough, except, indeed, that Lugar the Gordon setter was in a fair way of being spoilt, for that, owing to Ronald's parting injunctions, there was not a man or boy about the place would subject the dog to any kind of chastisement or discipline whatever. And it sounded strange to Ronald to hear that he was still remembered away up there in the remote little hamlet.

On the morning of the day before the Twelfth his books did not get much attention. He kept going to the window to watch the arrivals at the railway station opposite, wondering whether this one or that was off and away to the wide moors and the hills. Then, about mid-day, he saw a young lad bring up four dogs—a brace of setters, a small spaniel, and a big brown retriever—and give them over in charge to a porter. Well, human nature could not stand this any longer. His books were no longer thought of; on went his Glengarry cap; and in a couple of minutes he was

across the road and into the station, where the porter was hauling the dogs along the platform.

'Here, my man, I'll manage the doggies for ye,' he said, getting hold of the chains and straps; and of course the dogs at once recognised in him a natural ally and were less alarmed. A shambling, bow-legged porter hauling at them they could not understand at all; but in the straight figure and sun-tanned cheek and clear eye of the newcomer they recognised features familiar to them; and then he spoke to them as if he knew them.

'Ay, and what's your name, then?—Bruce, or Wallace, or Soldier?—but there'll no be much work for you for a while yet. It's you, you two bonnie lassies, that'll be amongst the heather the morn; and well I can see ye'll work together, and back each other, and just set an example to human folk. And if ye show yourselves just a wee bit eager at the beginning o' the day—well, well, well, we all have our faults, and that one soon wears off. And what's your names, then?—Lufra, or Nell, or Bess, or Fan? And you, you wise auld chiel—I'm thinking ye could get a grip o' a mallard that would make him imagine he had got back into his mother's nest—you're a wise one—the Free Kirk elder o' the lot'—for, indeed, the rest of them were all pawing at him, and licking his hands, and whimpering their friendship. The porter had to point out to him that he, the porter, could not stand there the whole day with 'a wheen dogs;' whereupon Ronald led these new companions of his along to the dog-box that had been provided for them, and there, when they had been properly secured, the porter left him. Ronald could still talk to them however, and ask them questions; and they seemed to understand well

enough: indeed, he had not spent so pleasant a half-hour for many and many a day.

There chanced to come along the platform a little, wiry, elderly man, with a wholesome-looking weather-tanned face, who was carrying a bundle of fishing-rods over his shoulder; and seeing how Ronald was engaged he spoke to him in passing and began to talk about the dogs.

'Perhaps they're your dogs?' Ronald said.

'No, no, our folk are a' fishing folk,' said the little old man, who was probably a gardener or something of the kind, and who seemed to take readily to this new acquaintance. 'I've just been in to Glasgow to get a rod mended, and to bring out a new one that the laird has bought for himself.'

He grinned in a curious sarcastic way.

'He's rather a wee man; and this rod—Lord sakes, ye never saw such a thing! it would break the back o' a Samson—bless ye, the butt o't's like a weaver's beam; and for our gudeman to buy a thing like that—well, rich folk hae queer ways o' spending their money.'

He was a friendly old man; and this joke of his master having bought so tremendous an engine seemed to afford him so much enjoyment that when Ronald asked to be allowed to see this formidable weapon he said at once—

'Just you come along outside there, and we'll put it thegither, and ye'll see what kind o' salmon-rod an old man o' five foot five thinks he can cast wi'——'

'If it's no taking up too much of your time,' Ronald suggested, but eager enough he was to get a salmon-rod into his fingers again.

'I've three quarters of an hour to wait,' was the reply, 'for I canna make out they train books ava.'

They went out beyond the platform to an open space, and very speedily the big rod was put together. It was indeed an enormous thing; but a very fine rod, for all that; and so beautifully balanced and so beautifully pliant that Ronald, after having made one or two passes through the air with it, could not help saying to the old man, and rather wistfully too—

'I suppose ye dinna happen to have a reel about ye?'

'That I have,' was the instant answer, 'and a brand new hundred-yard line on it too. Would ye like to try a cast? I'm thinking ye ken something about it.'

It was an odd kind of place to try the casting-power of a salmon-rod, this dismal no-man's-land of empty trucks and rusted railway-points and black ashes; but no sooner had Ronald begun to send out a good line—taking care to recover it so that it should not fray itself along the gritty ground—than the old man perceived he had to deal with no amateur.

'Man, ye're a dab, and no mistake! As clean a line as ever I saw cast! It's no the first time *you've* handled a salmon-rod, I'll be bound!'

'It's the best rod I've ever had in my hand,' Ronald said, as he began to reel in the line again. 'I'm much obliged to ye for letting me try a cast—it's many a day now since I threw a line.'

They took the rod down and put it in its case.

'I'm much obliged to ye,' Ronald repeated (for the mere handling of this rod had fired his veins with a strange kind of excitement). 'Will ye come and take a dram?'

'No, thank ye, I'm a teetotaller,' said the other; and then he glanced at Ronald curiously. 'But ye seem to ken plenty about dogs and about fishing and so on—what are

ye doing in Glasgow and the morn the Twelfth? Ye are not a town lad?'

'No, I'm not; but I have to live in the town at present,' was the answer. 'Well, good-day to ye; and many thanks for the trial o' the rod.'

'Good-day, my lad; I wish I had your years and the strength o' your shouthers.'

In passing Ronald said good-bye again to the handsome setters and the spaniel and the old retriever; and then he went on and out of the station, but it was not to return to his books. The seeing of so many people going away to the north, the talking with the dogs, the trial of the big salmon-rod, had set his brain a little wild. What if he were to go back and beg of the withered old man to take him with him—ay, even as the humblest of gillies, to watch, gaff in hand, by the side of the broad silver-rippling stream, or to work in a boat on a blue-ruffled loch! To jump into a third-class carriage and know that the firm inevitable grip of the engine was dragging him away into the clearer light, the wider skies, the glad free air! No wonder they said that fisher folk were merry folk; the very jolting of the engine would in such a case have a kind of music in it; how easily could one make a song that would match with the swing of the train! It was in his head now, as he rapidly and blindly walked away along the Cowcaddens, and along the New City Road, and along the Western Road—random rhymes, random verses, that the jolly company could sing together as the engine thundered along—

Out of the station we rattle away,
Wi' a clangour of axle and wheel;
There's a merrier sound that we know in the north—
The merry, merry shriek of the reel!

O you that shouther the heavy iron gun,
And have steep, steep braes to speel—
We envy you not; enough is for us
The merry, merry shriek of the reel!

When the twenty-four pounder leaps in the air,
And the line flies out with a squeal—
O that is the blessedest sound upon earth,
The merry, merry shriek of the reel!

So here's to good fellows!—for them that are not,
Let them gang and sup kail wi' the deil!
We've other work here—so look out, my lads,
For the first, sharp shriek of the reel!

He did not care to put the rough-jolting verses down on paper, for the farther and the more rapidly he walked away out of the town the more was his brain busy with pictures and visions of all that they would be doing at this very moment at Inver-Mudal.

'God bless me,' he said to himself, 'I could almost swear I hear the dogs whimpering in the kennels.'

There would be the young lads looking after the panniers and the ponies; and the head-keeper up at the lodge discussing with Lord Ailine the best way of taking the hill in the morning, supposing the wind to remain in the same direction; and Mr. Murray at the door of the inn, smoking his pipe as usual; and the pretty Nelly indoors waiting upon the shooting party just arrived from the south and listening to all their wants. And Harry would be wondering, amid all this new bustle and turmoil, why his master did not put in an appearance; perhaps scanning each succeeding dog-cart or waggonette that came along the road; and then, not so blithe-spirited, making his way to the Doctor's house. Comfort awaited him there, at all events; for Ronald had heard that Meenie had taken pity on the little terrier, and

that it was a good deal oftener with her than at the inn. Only all this seemed now so strange; the great dusk city lay behind him like a nightmare from which he had but partially escaped, and that with tightened breath; and he seemed to be straining his ears to catch those soft and friendly voices so far away. And then later on, as the darkness fell, what would be happening there? The lads would be coming along to the inn; lamps lit, and chairs drawn in to the table; Mr. Murray looking in at times with his jokes, and perhaps with a bit of a treat on so great an occasion. And surely—surely—as they begin to talk of this year and of last year and of the changes—surely some one will say—perhaps Nelly, as she brings in the ale—but surely some one will say—as a mere word of friendly remembrance—'Well, I wish Ronald was here now with his pipes, to play us *The Barren Rocks of Aden.*' Only a single friendly word of remembrance—it was all that he craved.

He struck away south through Dowanhill and Partick, and crossed the Clyde at Govan Ferry; then he made his way back to the town and Jamaica Street bridge; and finally, it being now dusk, looked in to see whether Mrs. Menzies was at leisure for the evening.

'What's the matter, Ronald?' she said instantly, as he entered, for she noticed that his look was careworn and strange.

'Well, Katie, lass, I don't quite know what's the matter wi' me, but I feel as if I just couldna go back to that room of mine and sit there by myself—at least not yet; I think I've been put a bit daft wi' seeing the people going away for the Twelfth; and if ye wouldna mind my sitting here for a while with ye, for the sake o' company——'

'Mind!' she said. 'Mind! What I do mind is that you should be ganging to that lodging-house at a', when there's a room—and a comfortable room, though I say it that shouldn't—in this very house at your disposal, whenever ye like to bring your trunk till it. There it is—an empty room, used by nobody—and who more welcome to it than my ain cousin? I'll tell ye what, Ronald, my lad, ye're wearing yoursel' away on a gowk's errand. Your certificate! How do ye ken ye'll get your certificate? How do ye ken ye will do such great things with it when ye get it? You're a young man; you'll no be a young man twice; what I say is, take your fling when ye can get it! Look at Jimmy Laidlaw—he's off the first thing in the morning to the Mearns—£15 for his share of the shooting—do ye think he can shoot like you?—and why should ye no have had your share too?'

'Well, it was very kind of you, Katie, woman, to make the offer; but—but—there's a time for everything.'

'Man, I could have driven ye out every morning in the dog-cart! and welcome. I'm no for having young folk waste the best years of their life, and find out how little use the rest o't's to them—no that I consider mysel' one o' the auld folk yet——'

'You, Katie dear!' whined old mother Paterson from her millinery corner. 'You—just in the prime o' youth, one micht say! you one o' the auld folk?—ay, in thirty years' time maybe!'

'Take my advice, Ronald, my lad,' said the widow boldly. 'Dinna slave away for naething—because folk have put fancy notions into your head. Have a better opinion o' yoursel'! Take your chance o' life when ye can get it—books and books, what's the use o' books?'

'Too late now—I've made my bed and maun lie on it,' he said gloomily; but then he seemed to try to shake off this depression. 'Well, well, lass, Rome was not built in a day. And if I were to throw aside my books, what then? How would that serve? Think ye that that would make it any the easier for me to get a three-weeks' shooting wi' Jimmy Laidlaw?'

'And indeed ye might have had that in any case, and welcome,' said Kate Menzies, with a toss of her head. 'Who is Jimmy Laidlaw, I wonder! But it's no use arguin' wi' ye, Ronald, lad; he that will to Cupar maun to Cupar; only I dinna like to see ye looking just ill.'

'Enough said, lass; I didna come here to torment ye with my wretched affairs,' he answered; and at this moment the maidservant entered to lay the cloth for supper, while Mrs. Menzies withdrew to make herself gorgeous for the occasion.

He was left with old mother Paterson.

'There's none so blind as them that winna see,' she began, in her whining voice.

'What is't?'

'Ay, ay,' she continued, in a sort of maundering soliloquy, 'a braw woman like that—and free-handed as the day—she could have plenty offers if she liked. But there's none so blind as them that winna see. There's Mr. Laidlaw there, a good-looking man, and wan wi' a good penny at the bank; and wouldna he just jump at the chance, if she had a nod or a wink for him? But Katie was aye like that—headstrong; she would aye have her ain way—and there she is, a single woman, a braw, handsome, young woman—and weel provided for—weel provided for—only it's no every one that takes

her fancy. A prize like that, to be had for the asking! Dear me—but there's nane so blind as them that winna see.'

It was not by any means the first time that mother Paterson had managed to drop a few dark hints—and much to his embarrassment, moreover, for he could not pretend to ignore their purport. Nay, there was something more than that. Kate Menzies's rough-and-ready friendliness for her cousin had of late become more and more pronounced—almost obtrusive, indeed. She wanted to have the mastery of his actions altogether. She would have him pitch his books aside and come for a drive with her whether he was in the humour or no. She offered him the occupancy of a room which, if it was not actually within the tavern, communicated with it. She seemed unable to understand why he should object to her paying £15 to obtain for him a share in a small bit of conjoint shooting out at the Mearns. And so forth in many ways. Well, these things, taken by themselves, he might have attributed to a somewhat tempestuous good-nature; but here was this old woman, whenever a chance occurred, whining about the folly of people who did not see that Katie dear was so handsome and generous and so marvellous a matrimonial prize. Nor could he very well tell her to mind her own business, for that would be admitting that he understood her hints.

However, on this occasion he had not to listen long; for presently Mrs. Menzies returned, smiling, good-natured, radiant in further finery; and then they all had supper together; and she did her best to console her cousin for being cooped up in the great city on the eve of the Twelfth. And Ronald was very grateful to her; and perhaps, in his eager desire to keep up this flow of high

spirits, and to forget what was happening at Inver-Mudal and about to happen, he may have drunk a little too much; at all events, when Laidlaw and Jaap and the skipper came in they found him in a very merry mood, and Kate Menzies equally hilarious and happy. Songs? —he was going to no Harmony Club that night, he declared—he would sing them as many songs as ever they liked—but he was not going to forsake his cousin. Nor were the others the least unwilling to remain where they were; for here they were in privacy, and the singing was better, and the liquor unexceptionable. The blue smoke rose quietly in the air; the fumes of Long John warmed blood and brain; and then from time to time they heard of the brave, or beautiful, or heart-broken maidens of Scotch song—Maggie Lauder, or Nelly Munro, or Barbara Allan, as the chance might be—and music and good fellowship and whisky all combined to throw a romantic halo round these simple heroines.

'But sing us one o' your own, Ronald, my lad—there's none better, and that's what I say!' cried the widow; and as she happened to be passing his chair at the time—going to the sideboard for some more lemons, she slapped him on the shoulder by way of encouragement.

'One o' my own?' said he. 'But which—which—lass? Oh, well, here's one.'

He lay back in his chair, and quite at haphazard and carelessly and jovially began to sing—in that clearly penetrating voice that neither tobacco smoke nor whisky seemed to affect—

Roses white, roses red,
Roses in the lane,
Tell me, roses red and white,
Where is———

And then suddenly something seemed to grip his heart. But the stumble was only for the fiftieth part of a second. He continued:

Where is Jeannie gane?

And so he finished the careless little verses. Nevertheless, Kate Menzies, returning to her seat, had noticed that quick, instinctive pulling of himself up.

'And who's Jeannie when she's at home?' she asked saucily.

'Jeannie?' he said, with apparent indifference. 'Jeannie? There's plenty o' that name about.'

'Ay; and how many o' them are at Inver-Mudal?' she asked, regarding him shrewdly, and with an air which he resented.

But the little incident passed. There was more singing, drinking, smoking, talking of nonsense and laughing. And at last the time came for the merry companions to separate; and he went away home through the dark streets alone. He had drunk too much, it must be admitted; but he had a hard head; and he had kept his wits about him; and even now as he ascended the stone stairs to his lodgings he remembered with a kind of shiver, and also with not a little heartfelt satisfaction, how he had just managed to save himself from bringing Meenie's name before that crew.

CHAPTER XIV.

ENTANGLEMENTS.

And then came along the great evening on which the first of Ronald's songs that Mr. Jaap had set to music was to be sung at the Harmony Club. Ronald had unluckily got into the way of going a good deal to that club. It was a relief from weary days and vain regrets; it was a way of escape from the too profuse favours that Kate Menzies wished to shower upon him. Moreover, he had become very popular there. His laugh was hearty; his jokes and sarcasms were always good-natured; he could drink with the best without getting quarrelsome. His acquaintanceship rapidly extended; his society was eagerly bid for, in the rough-and-ready fashion that prevails towards midnight; and long after the club was closed certain of these boon-companions would 'keep it up' in this or the other bachelor's lodgings, while through the open window there rang out into the empty street the oft-repeated chorus—

> '*We are na fou', we're nae that fou',*
> *But just a drappie in our e'e;*
> *The cock may craw, the day may daw,*
> *And aye we'll taste the barley bree!*'

The night-time seemed to go by so easily; the daytime was so slow. He still did his best, it is true, to get on with

this work that had so completely lost all its fascination for him; and he tried hard to banish dreams. For one thing, he had gathered together all the fragments of verse he had written about Meenie, and had added thereto the little sketch of Inver-Mudal she had given him; and that parcel he had resolutely locked away, so that he should no longer be tempted to waste the hours in idle musings, and in useless catechising of himself as to how he came to be in Glasgow at all. He had forborne to ask from Maggie the answer that Meenie had sent to her letter. In truth, there were many such; for there was almost a constant correspondence between these two; and as the chief subject of Maggie's writings was always and ever Ronald, there were no doubt references to him in the replies that came from Inver-Mudal. But he only heard vaguely of these; he did not call often at his brother's house; and he grew to imagine that the next definite news he would hear about Meenie would be to the effect that she had been sent to live with the Stuarts of Glengask, with a view to her possible marriage with some person in their rank of life.

There was a goodly to-do at the Harmony Club on the evening of the production of the new song; for Ronald, as has been said, was much of a favourite; and his friends declared that if Jaap's music was at all up to the mark, then the new piece would be placed on the standard and permanent list. Mr. Jaap's little circle, on the other hand, who had heard the air, were convinced that the refrain would be caught at once; and as the success of the song seemed thus secure, Mrs. Menzies had resolved to celebrate the occasion by a supper after the performance, and Jimmy Laidlaw had presented her, for that

purpose, with some game which he declared was of his own shooting.

'What's the use o' making such a fuss about nothing?' Ronald grumbled.

'What?' retorted the big skipper facetiously. 'Naething? Is bringing out a new poet naething?'

Now this drinking song, as it turned out, was a very curious kind of drinking song. Observe that it was written by a young fellow of eight-and-twenty; of splendid physique, and of as yet untouched nerve, who could not possibly have had wide experience of the vanities and disappointments of human life. What iron had entered into his soul, then, that a gay and joyous drinking song should have been written in this fashion?—

Good friends and neighbours, life is short,
And man, they say, is made to mourn;
Dame Fortune makes us all her sport,
And laughs our very best to scorn:
Well, well; we'll have, if that be so,
A merry glass before we go.

The blue-eyed lass will change her mind,
And give her kisses otherwhere;
And she'll be cruel that was kind,
And pass you by with but a stare:
Well, well; we'll have, if that be so,
A merry glass before we go.

The silly laddie sits and fills
Wi' dreams and schemes the first o' life;
And then comes heap on heap o' ills,
And squalling bairns and scolding wife:
Well, well; we'll have, if that be so,
A merry glass before we go.

Come stir the fire and make us warm;
The night without is dark and wet;

An hour or twa 'twill do nae harm
The dints o' fortune to forget:
So now we'll have, come weal or woe,
Another glass before we go.

To bonny lasses, honest blades,
We'll up and give a hearty cheer;
Contention is the worst of trades—
We drink their health, both far and near:
And so we'll have, come weal or woe,
Another glass before we go.

And here's ourselves!—no much to boast;
For man's a wean that lives and learns;
And some win hame, and some are lost;
But still—we're all John Thomson's bairns!
So here, your hand!—come weal or woe,
Another glass before we go!

'*And some win hame, and some are lost*'—this was a curious note to strike in a bacchanalian song; but of course in that atmosphere of tobacco and whisky and loud-voiced merriment such minor touches were altogether unnoticed.

'Gentlemen,' called out the rubicund chairman, rapping on the table, 'silence, if you please. Mr. Aikman is about to favour us with a new song written by our recently-elected member, Mr. Ronald Strang, the music by our old friend Mr. Jaap. Silence—silence, if you please.'

Mr. Aikman, who was a melancholy-looking youth, with a white face, straw-coloured hair, and almost colourless eyes, stepped on to the platform, and after the accompanist had played a few bars of prelude, began the song. Feeble as the young man looked, he had, notwithstanding, a powerful baritone voice; and the air was simple, with a well-marked swing in it; so that the refrain—at first rather uncertain and experimental—became after the first verse more and more general, until it may be said that the whole room

formed the chorus. And from the very beginning it was clear that the new song was going to be a great success. Any undercurrent of reflection—or even of sadness—there might be in it was not perceived at all by this roaring assemblage; the refrain was the practical and actual thing; and when once they had fairly grasped the air, they sang the chorus with a will. Nay, amid the loud burst of applause that followed the last verse came numerous cries for an encore; and these increased until the whole room was clamorous; and then the pale-faced youth had to step back on to the platform and get through all of the verses again.

> *'So here, your hand!—come weal or woe,*
> *Another glass before we go!'*

roared the big skipper and Jimmy Laidlaw with the best of them; and then in the renewed thunder of cheering that followed—

'Man, I wish Kate Menzies was here,' said the one; and—

'Your health, Ronald, lad; ye've done the trick this time,' said the other.

'Gentlemen,' said the chairman, again calling them to silence, 'I propose that the thanks of the club be given to these two members whom I have named, and who have kindly allowed us to place this capital song on our permanent list.'

'I second that, Mr. Chairman,' said a little, round, fat man, with a beaming countenance and a bald head; 'and I propose that we sing that song every night just afore we leave.'

But this last suggestion was drowned amidst laughter and cries of dissent. 'What?—instead of "Auld Lang Syne"?'

'Ye're daft, John Campbell.' 'Would ye hae the ghost o' Robbie Burns turning up?' Indeed, the chairman had to interpose and suavely say that while the song they had just heard would bring any such pleasant evenings as they spent together to an appropriate close, still, they would not disturb established precedent; there would be many occasions, he hoped, for them to hear this production of two of their most talented members.

In the interval of noise and talk and laughter that followed, it seemed to Ronald that half the people in the hall wanted him to drink with them. Fame came to him in the shape of unlimited proffers of glasses of whisky; and he experienced so much of the delight of having become a public character as consisted in absolute strangers assuming the right to make his acquaintance off-hand. Of course they were all members of the same club; and in no case was very strict etiquette observed within these four walls; nevertheless Ronald found that he had immediately and indefinitely enlarged the circle of his acquaintance; and that this meant drink.

'Another glass?' he said, to one of those strangers who had thus casually strolled up to the table where he sate. 'My good friend, there was nothing said in that wretched song about a caskful. I've had too many other ones already.'

However, relief came; the chairman hammered on the table; the business of the evening was resumed; and the skipper, Jaap, Laidlaw, and Ronald were left to themselves.

Now there is no doubt that this little circle of friends was highly elated over the success of the new song; and Ronald had been pleased enough to hear the words he had

written so quickly caught up and echoed by that, to him, big assemblage. Probably, too, they had all of them, in the enthusiasm of the moment, been somewhat liberal in their cups; at all events, a little later on in the evening, when Jimmy Laidlaw stormily demanded that Ronald should sing a song from the platform—to show them what East Lothian could do, as Kate Menzies had said—Ronald did not at once, as usual, shrink from the thought of facing so large an audience. It was the question of the accompaniment, he said. He had had no practice in singing to a piano. He would put the man out. Why should he not sing here—if sing he must—at the table where they were sitting? That was what he was used to; he had no skill in keeping correct time; he would only bother the accompanist, and bewilder himself.

'No, I'll tell ye what it is, Ronald, my lad,' his friend Jaap said to him. 'I'll play the accompaniment for ye, if ye pick out something I'm familiar wi'; and don't you heed me; you look after yourself. Even if ye change the key—and that's not likely—I'll look after ye. Is't a bargain?'

Well, he was not afraid—on this occasion. It was announced from the chair that Mr. Ronald Strang, to whom they were already indebted, would favour the company with 'The MacGregors' Gathering,' accompanied by Mr. Jaap; and in the rattle of applause that followed this announcement, Ronald made his way across the floor and went up the couple of steps leading to the platform. Why he had consented he hardly knew, nor did he stay to ask. It was enough that he had to face this long hall, and its groups of faces seen through the pale haze of the tobacco smoke; and then the first notes of the piano startled him into the necessity of getting into the same key. He began

—a little bewildered, perhaps, and hearing his own voice too consciously—

> '*The moon's on the lake, and the mist's on the brae,*
> *And the clan has a name that is nameless by day.*'

'Louder, man, louder!' the accompanist muttered, under his breath.

Whether it was this admonition, or whether it was that he gained confidence from feeling himself in harmony with the firm-struck notes of the accompaniment, his voice rose in clearness and courage, and he got through the first verse with very fair success. Nay, when he came to the second, and the music went into a pathetic minor, the sensitiveness of his ear still carried him through bravely—

> '*Glenorchy's proud mountains, Colchurn and her towers,*
> *Glenstrae and Glen Lyon no longer are ours—*
> *We're landless, landless, landless, Gregalach.*'

All this was very well done; for he began to forget his audience a little, and to put into his singing something of the expression that had come naturally enough to him when he was away on the Clebrig slopes or wandering along Strath-Terry. As for the audience—when he had finished and stepped back to his seat—they seemed quite electrified. Not often had such a clear-ringing voice penetrated that murky atmosphere. But nothing would induce Ronald to repeat the performance.

'What made me do it?' he kept asking himself. 'What made me do it? Bless me, surely I'm no fou'?'

'Ye've got a most extraordinarily fine voice, Mr. Strang,' the chairman said, in his most complaisant manner, 'I hope it's not the last time ye'll favour us.'

Ronald did not answer this. He seemed at once moody and restless. Presently he said—

'Come away, lads, come away. In God's name let's get a breath o' fresh air—the smoke o' this place is like the bottomless pit.'

'Then let's gang down and have a chat wi' Kate Menzies,' said Jimmy Laidlaw at once.

'Ye're after that supper, Jimmy!' the big skipper said facetiously.

'What for no? Would ye disappoint the woman; and her sae anxious to hear what happened to Strang's poetry? Come on, Ronald—she'll be as proud as Punch. And we'll tell her about "The MacGregors' Gathering"—she said East Lothian would show them something.'

'Very well, then—very well; anything to get out o' here,' Ronald said; and away they all went down to the tavern.

The widow received them most graciously; and very sumptuous indeed was the entertainment she had provided for them. She knew that the drinking song would be successful—if the folk had common sense and ears. And he had sung 'The MacGregors' Gathering' too?—well, had they ever heard singing like that before?

'But they have been worrying you?' she said, glancing shrewdly at him. 'Or, what's the matter—ye look down in the mouth—indeed, Ronald, ye've never looked yoursel' since the night ye came in here just before the grouse-shooting began. Here, man, drink a glass o' champagne; that'll rouse ye up.'

Old mother Paterson was at this moment opening a bottle.

'Not one other drop of anything, Katie, lass, will I drink this night,' Ronald said.

'What? A lively supper we're likely to have, then!' the widow cried. 'Where's your spunk, man? I think

ye're broken-hearted about some lassie—that's what it is! Here, now.'

She brought him the foaming glass of champagne; but he would not look at it.

'And if I drink to your health out o' the same glass?'

She touched the glass with her lips.

'There, now, if you're a man, ye'll no refuse noo.'

Nor could he. And then the supper came along; and there was eating and talking and laughing and further drinking, until a kind of galvanised hilarity sprang up once more amongst them. And she would have Ronald declare to them which of the lasses in Sutherlandshire it was who had broken his heart for him; and, in order to get her away from that subject, he was very amenable in her hands, and would do anything she bade him, singing first one song and then another, and not refusing the drinking of successive toasts. As for the others, they very prudently declined having anything to do with champagne. But Ronald was her pet, her favourite; and she had got a special box of cigars for him—all wrapped up in silverfoil and labelled; and she would have them tell her over and over again how Ronald's voice sounded in the long hall when he sang—

'*Glenstrae and Glen Lyon no longer are ours,*'

and she would have them tell her again of the thunders of cheering that followed—

'*Well, well; we'll have, if that be so,*
Another glass before we go.'

Nay, she would have them try a verse or two of it there and then—led by Mr. Jaap; and she herself joined in the chorus; and they clinked their glasses together, and were

proud of their vocalisation and their good comradeship. Indeed, they prolonged this jovial evening as late as the law allowed them; and then the widow said gaily—

'There's that poor man thinks I'm gaun to allow him to gang away to that wretched hole o' a lodging o' his, where he's just eating his heart out wi' solitariness and a wheen useless books. But I'm not. I ken better than that, Ronald, my lad. Whilst ye've a' been singing and roaring, I've had a room got ready for ye; and there ye'll sleep this night, my man—for I'm not going to hae ye march away through the lonely streets, and maybe cut your throat ere daybreak; and ye can lock yourself in, if ye're feared that any warlock or bogle is likely to come and snatch ye; and in the morning ye'll come down and have your breakfast wi' auntie Paterson and me—and then—what then? What do ye think? When the dog-cart's at the door, and me gaun to drive ye oot to Campsie Glen? There, laddie, that's the programme; and wet or dry is my motto. If it's wet we'll sing "Come under my plaidie"; and we'll take a drop o' something comfortable wi' us to keep out the rain.'

'I wish I was gaun wi' ye, Mistress,' the big skipper said.

'Two's company and three's none,' said Kate Menzies, with a frank laugh. 'Is't a bargain, Ronald?'

'It's a bargain, lass; and there's my hand on't,' he said. 'Now, where's this room—for I don't know whether it has been the smoke, or the singing, or the whisky, or all o' them together, but my head's like a ship sailing before the wind, without any helm to steer her.'

'Your head!' she said proudly. 'Your head's like iron, man; there's nothing the matter wi' ye. And here's

Alec—he'll show you where your room is; and in the morning ring for whatever ye want; mind ye, a glass o' champagne and angostura bitters is just first-rate; and we'll have breakfast at whatever hour ye please—and then we'll be off to Campsie Glen.'

The little party now broke up, each going his several way; and Ronald, having bade them all good-night, followed the ostler-lad Alec along one or two gloomy corridors until he found the room that had been prepared for him. As he got to bed he was rather sick and sorry about the whole night's proceedings, he scarcely knew why; and his thinking faculty was in a nebulous condition; and he only vaguely knew that he would rather not have pledged himself to go to Campsie Glen on the following morning. No matter—'*another glass before we go*,' that was the last of the song they had all shouted: he had forgotten that other line—'*and some win hame, and some are lost.*'

CHAPTER XV.

CAMPSIE GLEN.

THE next morning, between nine and ten o'clock, there was a rapping at his door, and then a further rapping, and then he awoke—confused, uncertain as to his whereabouts, and with his head going like a threshing machine. Again there came the loud rapping.

'Come in, then,' he called aloud.

The door was opened, and there was the young widow, smiling and jocund as the morn, and very smartly attired; and alongside of her was a servant-lass bearing a small tray, on which were a tumbler, a pint bottle of champagne, and some angostura bitters.

'Bless me, woman,' he said, 'I was wondering where I was. And what's this now?—do ye want to make a drunkard o' me?'

'Not I,' said Kate Menzies blithely, 'I want to make a man o' ye. Ye'll just take a glass o' this, Ronald, my lad; and then ye'll get up and come down to breakfast; for we're going to have a splendid drive. The weather's as bright and clear as a new shilling; and I've been up since seven o'clock, and I'm free for the day now. Here ye are, lad; this'll put some life into ye.'

She shook a few drops of bitters into the tumbler, and

then poured out a foaming measure of the amber-coloured wine, and offered it to him. He refused to take it.

'I canna look at it, lass. There was too much o' that going last night.'

'And the very reason you should take a glass now!' she said. 'Well, I'll leave it on the mantelpiece, and ye can take it when ye get up. Make haste, Ronald, lad; it's a pity to lose so fine a morning.'

When they had left, he dressed as rapidly as possible, and went down. Breakfast was awaiting him—though it did not tempt him much. And then, by and by, the smart dog-cart was at the door; and a hamper was put in; and Kate Menzies got up and took the reins. There was no sick-and-sorriness about her at all events. She was radiant and laughing and saucy; she wore a driving-coat fastened at the neck by a horse-shoe brooch of brilliants, and a white straw hat with a wide-sweeping jet-black ostrich feather. It was clear that the tavern was a paying concern.

'And why will ye aye sit behind, Mr. Strang?' old mother Paterson whined, as she made herself comfortable in front. 'I am sure Katie would rather have ye here than an auld wife like me. Ye could talk to her ever so much better.'

'That would be a way to go driving through Glasgow town,' he said, as he swung himself up on the back seat; 'a man in front and a woman behind! Never you fear; there can be plenty of talking done as it is.'

But as they drove away through the city—and even Glasgow looked quite bright and cheerful on this sunny morning, and there was a stirring of cool air that was grateful enough to his throbbing temples—it appeared that the buxom widow wanted to have most of the talking to

herself. She was very merry; and laughed at his penitential scorn of himself; and was for spurring him on to further poetical efforts.

'East Lothian for ever!' she was saying, as they got away out by the north of the town. 'Didna I tell them? Ay, and ye've got to do something better yet, Ronald, my lad, than the "other glass before we go." You're no at that time o' life yet to talk as if everything had gone wrong; and the blue-eyed lass—what blue-eyed lass was it, I wonder, that passed ye by with but a stare? Let her, and welcome, the hussy; there's plenty others. But no, my lad, what I want ye to write is a song about Scotland, and the East Lothian part o't especially. Ye've no lived long enough in the Hielans to forget your ain country, have ye? and where's there a song about Scotland nowadays? "Caledonia's hills and dales"?—stuff!—I wonder Jaap would hae bothered his head about rubbish like that. No, no; we'll show them whether East Lothian canna do the trick!—and it's no the Harmony Club but the City Hall o' Glasgow that ye'll hear that song sung in—that's better like! Ye mind what Robbie says, Ronald, my lad?—

'E'en then a wish, I mind its power—
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast—
That I for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some useful' plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least.'

That's what ye've got to do yet, my man.'

And so they bowled along the wide whinstone road, out into this open landscape that seemed to lie behind a thin veil of pale-blue smoke. It was the country, no doubt; but a kind of sophisticated country; there were occasional

grimy villages and railway-embankments and canals and what not; and the pathway that ran alongside the wide highway was of black ashes—not much like a Sutherlandshire road. However, as they got still farther away from the town matters improved. There were hedges and woods—getting a touch of the golden autumn on their foliage now; the landscape grew brighter; those hills far ahead of them rose into a fairly clear blue sky. And then the brisk motion and the fresher air seemed to drive away from him the dismal recollections of the previous night; he ceased to upbraid himself for having been induced to sing before all those people; he would atone for the recklessness of his potations by taking greater care in the future. So that when in due course of time they reached the inn at the foot of Campsie Glen, and had the horse and trap put up, and set out to explore the beauties of that not too savage solitude, he was in a sufficiently cheerful frame of mind, and Kate Menzies had no reason to complain of her companion.

They had brought a luncheon basket with them; and as he had refused the proffered aid of a stable-lad, he had to carry this himself, and Kate Menzies was a liberal provider. Accordingly, as they began to make their way up the steep and slippery ascent—for rain had recently fallen, and the narrow path was sloppy enough—he had to leave the two women to look after themselves; and a fine haphazard scramble and hauling and pushing—with screams of fright and bursts of laughter—ensued. This was hardly the proper mood in which to seek out Nature in her sylvan retreats; but the truth is that the glen itself did not wear a very romantic aspect. No doubt there were massive boulders in the bed of the stream; and they had to clamber past

precipitous rocks; and overhead was a wilderness of foliage. But everything was dull-hued somehow, and damp-looking, and dismal; the green-mossed boulders, the stems of the trees, the dark red earth were all of a sombre hue; while here and there the eye caught sight of a bit of newspaper, or of an empty soda-water bottle, or perchance of the non-idyllic figure of a Glasgow youth seated astride a fallen bough, a pot-hat on his head and a Manilla cheroot in his mouth. But still, it was more of the country than the Broomielaw; and when Kate and her companion had to pause in their panting struggle up the slippery path, and after she had recovered her breath sufficiently to demand a halt, she would turn to pick ferns from the dripping rocks, or to ask Ronald if there were any more picturesque place than this in Sutherlandshire. Now Ronald was not in the least afflicted by the common curse of travellers — the desire for comparison; he was well content to say that it was a 'pretty bit glen'; for one thing his attention was chiefly devoted to keeping his footing, for the heavy basket was a sore encumbrance.

However, after some further climbing, they reached certain drier altitudes; and there the hamper was deposited, while they looked out for such trunks or big stones as would make convenient seats. The old woman was speechless from exhaustion; Kate was laughing at her own breathlessness, or miscalling the place for having dirtied her boots and her skirts; while Ronald was bringing things together for their comfort, so that they could have their luncheon in peace. This was not quite the same kind of a luncheon party as that he had attended on the shores of the far northern loch—with Miss Carry complacently regarding the silver-clear salmon lying on the smooth, dry

greensward; and the American talking in his friendly fashion of the splendid future that lay before a capable and energetic young fellow in the great country beyond the seas; while all around them the sweet air was blowing, and the clear light shining, and the white clouds sailing high over the Clebrig slopes. Things were changed with him since then—he did not himself know how much they had changed. But in all circumstances he was abundantly good-natured and grateful for any kindness shown him; and as Kate Menzies had projected this trip mainly on his account, he did his best to promote good-fellowship, and was serviceable and handy, and took her raillery in excellent part.

'Katie dear,' whimpered old mother Paterson, as Ronald took out the things from the hamper, 'ye jist spoil every one that comes near ye. Such extravagance—such waste—many's the time I wish ye would get married, and have a man to look after ye——'

'Stop your havering—who would marry an auld woman like me?' said Mrs. Menzies with a laugh. 'Ay, and what's the extravagance, noo, that has driven ye oot o' your mind?'

'Champagne again!' the old woman said, shaking her head. 'Champagne again! Dear me, it's like a Duke's house——'

'What, ye daft auld craytur? Would ye have me take my cousin Ronald for his first trip to Campsie Glen, and bring out a gill o' whisky in a soda-water bottle?'

'Indeed, Katie, lass, ye needna have brought one thing or the other for me,' he said. 'It's a drop o' water, and nothing else, that will serve my turn.'

'We'll see about that,' she said confidently.

Her provisioning was certainly of a sumptuous nature—far more sumptuous, indeed, than the luncheons the rich Americans used to have carried down for them to the loch-side, and a perfect banquet as compared with the frugal bit of cold beef and bread that Lord Ailine and his friends allowed themselves on the hill. Then, as regards the champagne, she would take no refusal—he had to submit. She was in the gayest of moods; she laughed and joked; nay, at one point, she raised her glass aloft, and waved it round her head, and sang—

> '*O send Lewie Gordon hame,*
> *And the lad I daurna name;*
> *Though his back be at the wa',*
> *Here's to him that's far awa'!*'

'What, what, lass?' Ronald cried grimly. 'Are ye thinking ye're in a Highland glen? Do ye think it was frae places like this that the lads were called out to follow Prince Charlie?'

'I carena—I carena!' she said; for what had trivial details of history to do with a jovial picnic in Campsie Glen? 'Come, Ronald, lad, tune up! Hang the Harmony Club!—give us a song in the open air!'

'Here goes, then—

> '*It was about the Martinmas time,*
> *And a gay time it was then, O,*
> *That our guidwife had puddins to mak',*
> *And she boiled them in the pan, O*'—

and then rang out the chorus, even the old mother Paterson joining in with a feeble treble—

> '*O the barrin' o' our door, weel, weel, weel,*
> *And the barrin' o' our door, weel!*'

'Your health and song, Ronald!' she cried, when he

had finished—or rather when they all had finished. 'Man, if there was just a laddie here wi' a fiddle or a penny whistle I'd get up and dance a Highland Schottische wi' ye—auld as I am!'

After luncheon, they set out for further explorations (having deposited the basket in a secret place) and always Kate Menzies's laugh was the loudest, her jokes the merriest.

'Auld, say ye?' mother Paterson complained. 'A lassie—a very lassie! Ye can skip about like a twa-year-auld colt.'

By and by they made their devious and difficult way down the glen again; and they had tea at the inn; and then they set out to drive back to Glasgow—and there was much singing the while. That is, up to a certain point; for this easy homeward drive, as it turned out, was destined to be suddenly and sharply stopped short, and that in a way that might have produced serious consequences. They were bowling merrily along, taking very little heed of anything on either side of them, when, as it chanced, a small boy who had gone into a field to recover a kite that had dropped there, came up unobserved behind the hedge, and threw the kite over, preparatory to his struggling through himself. The sudden appearance of this white thing startled the cob; it swerved to the other side of the road, hesitated, and was like to rear, and then getting an incautious cut from Kate's whip, away it tore along the highway, getting completely the mastery of her. Ronald got up behind.

'Give me the reins, lass,' he called to her.

'I'll manage him—the stupid beast!' she said; with her teeth shut firm.

But all her pulling seemed to make no impression on the animal—nay, the trap was now swaying and jolting about in a most ominous manner.

'If ye meet anything, we're done for, Kate—run the wheel into the hedge.'

It was excellent advice, if it could have been properly followed; but unluckily, just at the very moment when, with all her might and main, she twisted the head of the cob to the side of the road, there happened to be a deep ditch there. Over the whole thing went—Ronald and Mrs. Menzies being pitched clean into the hedge; mother Paterson, not hanging on so well, being actually deposited on the other side, but in a gradual fashion. Oddly enough, the cob, with one or two pawings of his forefeet, got on to the road again, and the trap righted itself; while a farm-lad who had been coming along ran to the beast's head and held him. As it turned out, there was no harm done at all.

But that, at first, was apparently not Kate Menzies's impression.

'Ronald, Ronald,' she cried, and she clung to him frantically, 'I'm dying—I'm dying—kiss me!'

He had got a grip of her, and was getting her on to her feet again.

'There's nothing the matter wi' ye, woman,' he said, with unnecessary roughness.

'Ronald, Ronald—I'm hurt—I'm dying—kiss me!' she cried, and she would have fallen away from him, but that he gathered her up, and set her upright on the road.

'There's nothing the matter wi' ye—what? tumbling into a hawthorn hedge?—pull yourself together, woman! It's old mother Paterson that may have been hurt.'

He left her unceremoniously to get over to the other

side of the hedge, and as he went off she darted a look of anger—of violent rage, even—towards him, which happily he did not see. Moreover, she had to calm herself; the farm lad was looking on. And when at length mother Paterson—who was merely terrified, and was quite uninjured—was hoisted over or through the hedge, and they all prepared to resume their seats in the trap, Kate Menzies was apparently quite collected and mistress of herself, though her face was somewhat pale, and her manner was distinctly reserved and cold. She gave the lad a couple of shillings; got up and took the reins; waited until the others were seated, and then drove away without a word. Mother Paterson was loud in her thankfulness over such a providential escape; she had only had her wrists scratched slightly.

Ronald was sensible of her silence, though he could not well guess the cause of it. Perhaps the fright had sobered down her high spirits; at all events, she was now more circumspect with her driving; and, as her attention was so much devoted to the cob, it was not for him to interfere. As they drew near Glasgow, however, she relaxed the cold severity of her manner, and made a few observations; and when they came in sight of St. Rollox, she even condescended to ask him whether he would not go on with them to the tavern and have some supper with them as usual.

'I ought to go back to my work,' said he, 'and that's the truth. But it would be a glum ending for such an unusual holiday as this.'

'Your prospects are not so very certain,' said Kate, who could talk excellent English when she chose, and kept her broad Scotch for familiar or affectionate intercourse. 'An

hour or two one way or the other is not likely to make much difference.'

'I am beginning to think that myself,' he said, rather gloomily.

And then, with a touch of remorse for the depressing speech she had made, she tried to cheer him a little; and, in fact, insisted on his going on with them. She even quoted a couplet from his own song to him—

> '*An hour or twa 'twill do nae harm,*
> *The dints o' fortune to forget*';

and she said that, after the long drive, he ought to have a famous appetite for supper, and that there would be a good story to tell about their being shot into a hawthorn hedge, supposing that the skipper and Laidlaw and Jaap came in in the evening.

Nevertheless, all during the evening there was a certain restraint in her manner. Altogether gone was her profuse friendship and her pride in East Lothian, although she remained as hospitable as ever. Sometimes she regarded him sharply, as if trying to make out something. On his part, he thought she was probably a little tired after the fatigues of the day; perhaps, also, he preferred her quieter manner.

Then again, when the '*drei Gesellen*' came in, there was a little less hilarity than usual; and, contrary to her wont, she did not press them to stay when they proposed to adjourn to the club. Ronald, who had been vaguely resolving not to go near that haunt for some time to come, found that that was the alternative to his returning to his solitary lodging and his books at a comparatively early hour of the evening. Doubtless he should have conquered his repugnance to this later course; but the temptation—after a long day of pleasure-making—to finish up the last

hour or so in the society of these good fellows was great. He went to the Harmony Club, and was made more welcome than ever; and somehow, in the excitement of the moment, he was induced to sing another song, and there were more people than ever claiming his acquaintance, and challenging him to have 'another one.'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DOWNWARD WAY.

WITH a fatal certainty he was going from bad to worse; and there was no one to warn him; and if any one had warned him, probably he would not have cared. Life had come to be for him a hopeless and useless thing. His own instinct had answered true, when the American was urging him to go and cast himself into the eager strife of the world, and press forward to the universal goal of wealth and ease and independence. 'I'd rather be "where the dun deer lie,"' he had said. Kingsley's poem had taken firm root in his mind, simply because it found natural soil there.

'Nor I wadna be a clerk, mither, to bide aye ben,
Scrabbling ower the sheets o' parchment with a weary, weary pen;
Looking through the lang stane windows at a narrow strip o' sky,
Like a laverock in a withy cage, until I pine away and die.

. . . . . .

Ye'll bury me 'twixt the brae and the burn, in a glen far away,
Where I may hear the heathcock craw and the great harts bray;
And gin my ghaist can walk, mither, I'll go glowering at the sky,
The livelong night on the black hillsides where the dun deer lie.'

His way of existence up there on the far hillsides—unlike that of the luckless outlaw—had been a perfectly happy and contented one. His sound common sense had put

away from him that craving for fame which has rendered so miserable the lives of many rustic verse writers; he was proud of his occupation, grateful to the good friends around him, and always in excellent health and spirits. Another thing has to be said—to pacify the worthy folk who imagine that ambition must necessarily fill the mind of youth: had he come away from that sphere of careless content with a sufficient aim to strive for, perhaps affairs might have gone differently. If it could have been said to him: 'Fight your way to the worldly success that the Americans have so liberally prophesied for you; and then come back, and you will find Meenie Douglas awaiting you; and you shall win her and wear her, as the rose and crown of your life, in spite of all the Stuarts of Glengask'—then the little room in Port Dundas Road would no longer have been so gray; and all the future would have been filled with light and hope; and the struggle, however arduous and long, would have been glad enough. But with no such hope; with increasing doubts as to his ultimate success; and with a more dangerously increasing indifference as to whether he should ever reach that success, the temptations of the passing hour became irresistibly strong. And he became feebler to resist them. He did not care. After all, these gay evenings at the Harmony Club were something to look forward to during the long dull days; with a full glass and a good-going pipe and a roaring chorus the hours passed; and then from time to time there was the honour and glory of hearing one of his own songs sung. He was a great figure at these gatherings now; that kind of fame at least had come to him, and come to him unsought; and there were not wanting a sufficiency of rather muddle-headed creatures

who declared that he was fit to rank with very distinguished names indeed in the noble roll-call of Scotland's poets; and who, unfortunately, were only too eager to prove the faith that was in them by asking him to drink at their expense.

In this rhyming direction there was one very curious point: when he began to turn over the various pieces that might be made available for Mr. Jaap, he was himself astonished to find how little melody there was in them. Whatever little musical faculty he had seemed to be all locked up in the love-verses he had written about Meenie. Many of the fragments had other qualities — homely common sense; patriotism; a great affection for dumb animals; here and there sometimes a touch of humour or pathos; but somehow they did not *sing*. It is true that the following piece—

SHOUTHER TO SHOUTHER.

From Hudson's Bay to the Rio Grand',
The Scot is ever a rover;
In New South Wales and in Newfoundland,
And all the wide world over;

Chorus: *But it's shouther to shouther, my bonnie lads,*
And let every Scot be a brither;
And we'll work as we can, and we'll win if we can,
For the sake of our auld Scotch mither.

She's a puir auld wife, wi' little to give;
And she's rather stint o' caressing;
But she's shown us how honest lives we may live,
And she's sent us out wi' her blessing.

Chorus: *And it's shouther to shouther, etc.*

Her land's no rich; and her crops are slim;
And I winna say much for the weather;

But she's given us legs that can gaily clim'
Up the slopes o' the blossoming heather.

Chorus: *And it's shouther to shouther, etc.*

And she's given us hearts that, whatever they say
(And I trow that we might be better)
There's one sair fault they never will hae—
Our mither, we'll never forget her!

Chorus: *And it's shouther to shouther, my bonnie lads,*
And let every Scot be a brither;
And we'll work as we can, and we'll win if we can,
For the sake of our auld Scotch mither!

had attained a great success at the Harmony Club; but that was merely because Mr. Jaap had managed to write for it an effective air, that could be easily caught up and sung in chorus; in itself there was no simple, natural 'lilt' whatever. And then, again, in his epistolary rhymes to friends and acquaintances (alas! that was all over now) there were many obvious qualities, but certainly not the lyrical one. Here, for example, are some verses he had sent in former days to a certain Johnnie Pringle, living at Tongue, who had had his eye on a young lass down Loch Loyal way:

O Johnnie, leave the lass alane;
Her mother has but that one wean;
For a' the others have been ta'en,
As weel ye ken, Johnnie.

'Tis true her bonnie e'en would rive
The heart o' any man alive;
And in the husry[1] *she would thrive—*
I grant ye that, Johnnie.

[1] 'Husry,' housewifery.

But wad ye tak' awa the lass,
I tell ye what would come to pass,
The mother soon would hae the grass
Boon her auld head, Johnnie.

They've got some gear, and bit o' land
That well would bear another hand;
Come down frae Tongue, and take your stand
By Loyal's side, Johnnie!

Ye'd herd a bit, and work the farm,
And keep the widow-wife frae harm;
And wha would keep ye snug and warm
In winter-time, Johnnie?—

The lass hersel'—that I'll be sworn!
And bonnier creature ne'er was born:
Come down the strath the morrow's morn,
Your best foot first, Johnnie!

Well, there may be wise and friendly counsel in verses such as these; but they do not lend themselves readily to the musician who would adapt them for concert purposes. No; all such lyrical faculty as he possessed had been given in one direction. And yet not for one moment was he tempted to show Mr. Jaap any of those little love-lyrics that he had written about Meenie—those careless verses that seemed to sing themselves, as it were, and that were all about summer mornings, and red and white roses, and the carolling of birds, and the whispering of Clebrig's streams. Meenie's praises to be sung at the Harmony Club!—he could as soon have imagined herself singing there.

One wet and miserable afternoon old Peter Jaap was passing through St. Enoch Square when, much to his satisfaction, he ran against the big skipper, who had just come out of the railway station.

'Hallo, Captain,' said the little old man, 'back already?'

'Just up frae Greenock; and precious glad to be ashore again, I can tell ye,' said Captain M'Taggart. 'That *Mary Jane* 'll be my grave, mark my words; I never get as far south as the Mull o' Galloway without wondering whether I'll ever see Ailsa Craig or the Tail o' the Bank again. Well, here I am this time; and I was gaun doon to hae a glass on the strength o't—to the widow's——'

'We'll gang in some other place,' Mr. Jaap said. 'I want to hae a word wi' ye about that young fellow Strang.'

They easily discovered another howf; and soon they were left by themselves in a little compartment, two big tumblers of ale before them.

'Ay, and what's the matter wi' him?' said the skipper.

'I dinna rightly ken,' the little old musician said, 'but something is. Ye see, I'm feared the lad has no' muckle siller——'

'It's a common complaint, Peter!' the skipper said, with a laugh.

'Ay; but ye see, the maist o' us hae some way o' leevin. That's no the case wi' Ronald. He came to Glasgow, as I understand it, wi' a sma' bit nest-egg; and he's been leevin on that ever since—every penny coming out o' his capital, and never a penny being added. That's enough to make a young fellow anxious.'

'Ay?'

'But there's mair than that. He's a proud kind o' chiel. It's just wonderfu' the way that Mrs. Menzies humours him, and pretends this and that so he'll no be at any expense; and when they gang out driving she takes things wi' her—and a lot o' that kind o' way o' working;

but a' the same there's sma' expenses that canna be avoided, and deil a bit—she says—will he let her pay. And the sma' things maun be great things to him, if he's eating into his nest-egg in that way.'

'It's easy getting out o' that difficulty,' said the big skipper, who was of a less sympathetic nature than the old musician. 'What for does he no stay at hame? He doesna need to gang driving wi' her unless he likes.'

'It's no easy getting away frae Mrs. Menzies,' the old man said shrewdly, 'if she has a mind to take ye wi' her. And she hersel' sees that he canna afford to spend money even on little things; and yet she's feared to say anything to him. Man, dinna ye mind when she wanted him to take a room in the house?—what was that but that she meant him to have his board free? But no—the deevil has got some o' the Hielan pride in him; she was just feared to say anything mair about it. And at the club, too, it's no every one he'll drink wi' though there's plenty ready to stand Sam, now that Ronald is kent as a writer o' poetry. Not that but wi' ithers he's ower free—ay, confound him, he's getting the reputation o' a harum-scarum deil—if he takes a liking to a man, he'll gang off wi' him and his neighbours for the time being, and goodness knows when or where they'll stop. A bottle o' whisky in their pocket, and off they'll make; I heard the other week o' him and some o' them finding themselves at daybreak in Helensburgh—naught would do the rascal the night before but that he maun hae a sniff o' the saut sea-air; and off they set, him and them, the lang night through, until the daylight found them staring across to Roseneath and Kempoch Point. He's no in the best o' hands, that's the fact. If he would but marry the widow——'

'What would Jimmy Laidlaw say to that?' the skipper said, with a loud laugh.

'Jimmy Laidlaw? He hasna the ghost o' a chance so long as this young fellow's about. Kate's just daft about him; but he's no inclined that way, I can see—unless hunger should tame him. Weel, M'Taggart, I dinna like to see the lad being led away to the mischief. He's got into ill hands. If it's the want o' a settled way o' leevin that's worrying him, and driving him to gang wild and reckless at times, something should be done. I'm an auld man now; I've seen ower many young fellows like that gang to auld Harry; and I like this lad—I'm no going to stand by and look on without a word.'

'Ay, and what would ye hiv me dae, Peter? Take him as a hand on board the *Mary Jane?*'

'Na, na. The lad maun gang on wi' his surveying and that kind o' thing—though he seems less and less to think there'll be any solid outcome frae it. But what think ye o' this? There's Mr. Jackson paying they professionals from week to week; and here's a fellow wi' a finer natural voice than any o' them—if it had but a little training. Well, now, why shouldna Jackson pay the lad for his singing?'

'Not if he can get it for nothing, Peter!'

'But he canna—that's just the thing, man,' retorted the other. 'It's only when Ronald has had a glass and is in the humour that he'll sing anything. Why shouldna he be engaged like the others? It would be a stand-by. It would take up none o' his time. And it might make him a wee thing steadier if he kent he had to sing every night.'

'Very well, then, ask Tom Jackson about it,' the big skipper said. 'Ye may say it would please the members—

I'll back ye up wi' that. Confound him, I didna ken the deevil had got his leg ower the trace.'

The old man answered with a cautious smile:

'Ye're rough and ready, M'Taggart; but that'll no do. Ronald's a camstrairy chiel. There's Hielan blood in his veins; and ye never ken when his pride is gaun to bleeze oot and be up the lum wi'm in a fluff.'

'Beggars canna be choosers, my good freen——'

'Beggars? They Hielan folk are never beggars; they'll rob and plunder ye, and fling ye ower a hedge, and rifle your pockets, but deil a bit o' them 'll beg. Na, na; we'll have to contrive some roundabout way to see how he'll take it. But I'll speak to Jackson; and we'll contrive something, I doubtna. Sae finish up your beer, Captain; and if ye're gaun doon to see Mrs. Menzies, I'll gang as far wi' ye; I havena been there this nicht or twa.'

Now that was an amiable and benevolent, but, as it turned out, most unfortunate design. That same night Ronald did show up at the Harmony Club; and there was a little more than usual of hilarity and good fellowship over the return of the skipper from the perils of the deep. Laidlaw was there too; and he also had been acquainted with the way in which they meant to approach Ronald, to see whether he could not be induced to sing regularly at these musical meetings for a stipulated payment.

Their first difficulty was to get him to sing at all; and for a long time he was good-humouredly obdurate, and they let him alone. But later on in the evening one of his own songs was sung—'The fisher lads are bound for hame'—and was received with immense applause, which naturally pleased him; and then there was a good deal of talking

and laughing and conviviality; in the midst of which the skipper called to him—

'Now, Ronald, lad, tune up; I havena heard a song frae ye this three weeks and mair; man, if I had a voice like yours wouldna I give them—

> '"*The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith,*
> *Fu' loud the wind blaws frae the ferry;*
> *The ship rides by the Berwick Law,*
> *And I maun leave my bonnie Mary!*"'

And indeed he did, in this loud and general hum, sing these lines, in tones resembling the sharpening of a rusty saw.

'Very well, then,' Ronald said. 'But I'll sing it where I am—once there's quietness. I'm not going up on that platform.'

Of course, the chairman was glad enough to make the announcement, for Ronald's singing was highly appreciated by the members; moreover there was a little experiment to be tried. So peace was restored; the accompanist struck a few notes; and Ronald, with a little indecision at first, but afterwards with a clear-ringing courage, sang that gayest of all parting songs. In the hubbub of applause that followed none but the conspirators saw what now took place. The chairman called a waiter, and spoke a few words to him in an undertone; the waiter went over to the table where Ronald was sitting and handed him a small package; and then Ronald, naturally thinking that this was merely a written message or something of the kind, opened the folded piece of white paper.

There was a message, it is true,—'with T. Jackson's compliments,'—and there was also a sovereign and a

shilling. For an instant Ronald regarded this thing with a kind of bewilderment; and then his eyes blazed; the money was dashed on to the ground; and, without a word or a look to any one in the place, he had clapped on his hat and stalked to the door, his mouth firm shut, his lips pale. This glass door was a private door leading to an outer passage formerly described; the handle seemed stiff or awkward; so by main force he drove it before him, and the door swinging back into the lobby, smashed its glass panels against the wall. The 'breenge'—for there is no other word—caused by this violent departure was tremendous; and the three conspirators could only sit and look at each other.

'The fat's in the fire now,' said the skipper.

'I wonder if the guinea'll pay for the broken glass,' said Jimmy Laidlaw.

But it was the little old musican, whose scheme this had been, who was most concerned.

'We'll have to get hold o' the lad and pacify him,' said he. 'The Hielan deevil! But if he doesna come back here, he'll get among a worse lot than we are—we'll have to get hold o' him, Captain, and bring him to his senses.'

Well, in the end—after a day or two—Ronald was pacified; and he did go back to the club, and resumed his relations with the friends and acquaintances he had formed there. And that was how it came about that Meenie's married sister—who happened to know certain members of the Rev. Andrew Strang's congregation, and who was very curious to discover why it was that Meenie betrayed such a singular interest in this mere gamekeeper, and was repeatedly referring to him in her correspondence

—added this postscript to a letter which she was sending to Inver-Mudal:

'I don't know whether it may interest you to hear that Ronald Strang, Mr. Strang's brother, whom you have several times asked about, is *drinking himself to death*, and that in the lowest of low company.'

END OF VOL. II.

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